

SAMMY SAVES THE DAY!



**By Steve Tors
of Jan Oelofse Hunting Safaris in Namibia**

As is the case with all dangerous animals, it is imperative to track and find a wounded, full-grown lion immediately. Even in daylight it would be an undertaking fraught with difficulties and danger. Trying to do that at night is almost impossible. Fortunately we could rely on Sammy, my German hunting terrier, to come to the rescue. These dogs are small but fearless, with an exceptionally good nose for tracking blood trails. Without Sammy it would have been almost impossible to find the lion in the dark.

The slight evening breeze was rustling the leaves of our blind as it brought with it one of the eternal sounds of Africa – the doves cooing in a chorus all around us. The setting sun was just touching the horizon and everything seemed peaceful. Our eyes were focused on the bait-tree in front of us where, tied to its base, was a full-grown gemsbuck bull. Our gaze shifted back and forth as we searched for our quarry.

Time passed and then, all of a sudden, there was movement behind the bait. Something was coming towards us through the bush. At first I thought it could be a rhino because it appeared so big. However, as the animal came closer, it turned out to be our quarry – a huge male lion.

It was approaching cautiously, its attention focused on the bait. We had been baiting him continuously for a couple of months now, so he was pretty sure he was going to get a good meal. I tapped my client on the leg and he focused, brought up his rifle ... and we waited.

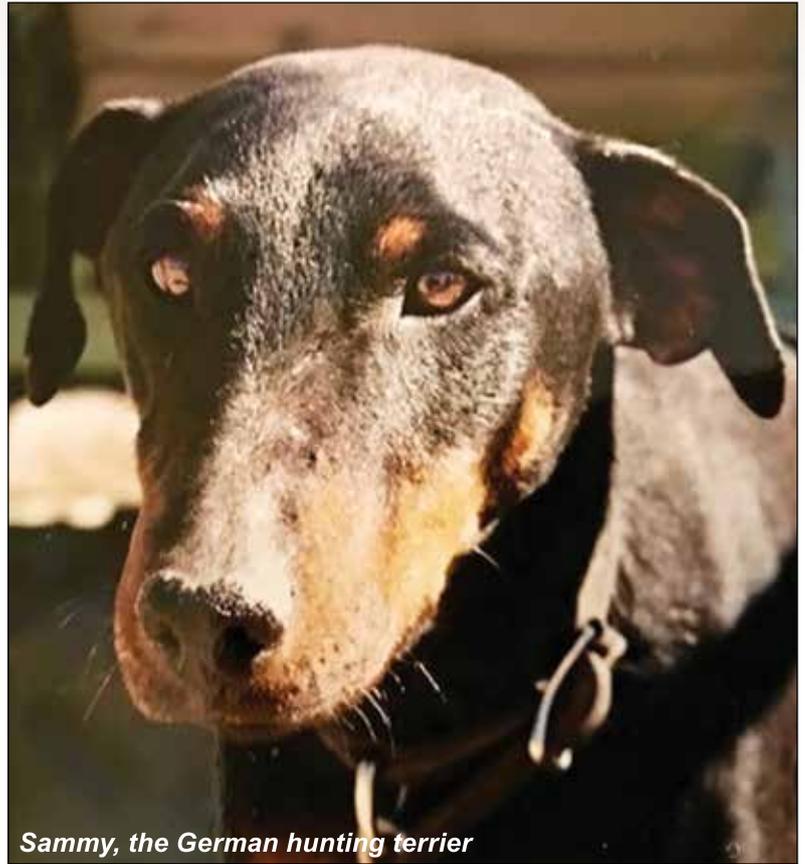
Then, with the light almost gone, the shot exploded in the cool night. The roar of the lion shattered the evening, making the ground tremble. He leapt into the air, writhing and clawing. As he hit the ground I shouted at the client to give him another shot. The shot went off but it was too late – the lion had already disappeared into the brush.

Now we waited in the hope of hearing the sound of the lion expiring. We listened intently but what we heard, wasn't encouraging. We could hear movement through the brush, almost like a dragging sound over the rocks and through the very thick swarthaak. By now it was almost totally dark. This was not a good situation. The dragging sound was fading but we could still hear it. Not good at all.

Two months earlier my client, Chuck Munk, from Flint, Michigan and I were driving through a brand new property that Jan Oelofse, owner of Jan Oelofse Hunting Safaris in Namibia, had just purchased. It was an existing cattle ranch and it bordered on our 30 000 ha game-fenced area. We were exploring the new territory.

A call came over the radio with a message from Jan, asking us to check on a fencing crew on the new property. They were breaking down the internal cattle fences and erecting the perimeter fence. They had told Jan that they had heard a lion roaring very close to their camp the previous evening.

The fencing crew were camped in the



Sammy, the German hunting terrier

middle of the property but they were refusing to stay in the bush with the lion around. It seemed very strange to Jan because there were no lions in that area. So Chuck and I went to have a look.

We went down to one of the river banks close to the camp – and, sure enough, walking up along the riverbank, we came across the tracks of a very large male lion. I contacted Jan on the radio and told him. He said to stand by, and that he was going to check on our own fenced-in area, where we had a pride of lions that we used for eco-tourism. The lions were always in a certain area and we fed them regularly for the tourists. After a while Jan came back to us with the news that all our 'resident' lions were there. This meant that the rogue lion was not one of our lions. It was very strange that a big, wild male lion would suddenly appear in the middle of the richest cattle country in north-central Namibia without anybody knowing about him.

After discovering this wild lion on our new property, we decided to start baiting him at one of the big waterholes. This was close to where we suspected he would approach from a hill on a neighbouring property. We set the bait, which he seemed to take quite easily. We were still wondering how a big male lion could be living in this area without anybody noticing him. There had been a few instances of cattle disappearing here and there on the farms but because the big ranches were very sparsely populated, he could easily have got away with taking a few cattle without it being noticed. There are many kudu and gemsbuck in the area so he could have been living off them, too. But now that we were fencing this new farm to incorporate it into our area, Jan wasn't sure what to do with this lion.

After two months of regular baiting, it was decided that we should hunt him down. We were thinking of maybe capturing him and putting him with our pride. However, since he was a big, full-grown male it wouldn't have worked – he would have fought with the other males and that could have resulted in the death of some of the other lions. We decided to hunt him.

We obtained a permit from the Ministry and after a couple of months, a client from Arizona – who had previously been on a hunt in Tanzania – decided that he would like to try to shoot the lion. That was when we set up the blind for the client. He was able to take a shot at the lion, which then disappeared into the gathering darkness.

Now what do you do? Pursuing a lion that was possibly wounded in the dark isn't something to take on lightly. I radioed Jan and explained our situation. He immediately set out with his wife, Annette, and reached us after a forty-minute drive from the ranch headquarters.

In the mean time, the client and I drove along our perimeter fence to see if we could catch any signs of the lion moving back onto the neighbouring farm, where he had settled in some small hills. One thing you do not want to do is call a neighbour and tell him there was a wounded lion on his property.

We found no lion tracks heading towards the neighbouring property, so I went home and picked up

my German hunting terrier, Sammy. He is an excellent hunting dog, small but completely fearless. We returned to the scene, where we linked up with Jan and Annette. We decided there was nothing we could do except try with the dog.

We let Sammy go and he was off in a flash. Less than five minutes later we heard him barking. He was obviously close to the lion, that was roaring and growling not 300 m away. We jumped into the vehicle and drove towards the commotion. The roaring and barking were getting louder as we were coming up over the rise. Using a spotlight, we saw the lion and the dog. Sammy was darting in and out but the lion, that had a broken shoulder, could not get to the dog, because it was so small and quick.

The client immediately lined up his sights and, with the dog being called back, he put the finishing shot into the lion. It had worked out well, but for all of us the adrenaline was still pumping. One can hardly imagine a more dangerous situation than confronting a wounded lion in the middle of the night!

We covered the lion with a tarp so that jackals and hyenas wouldn't get to him. He was too large to load, especially in an area which was inaccessible to the vehicle. We returned the next morning to retrieve the lion – a huge, beautiful animal with quite a nice mane. The client, needless to say, was ecstatic with his trophy! **ASM**



Photo: Christine Bothma