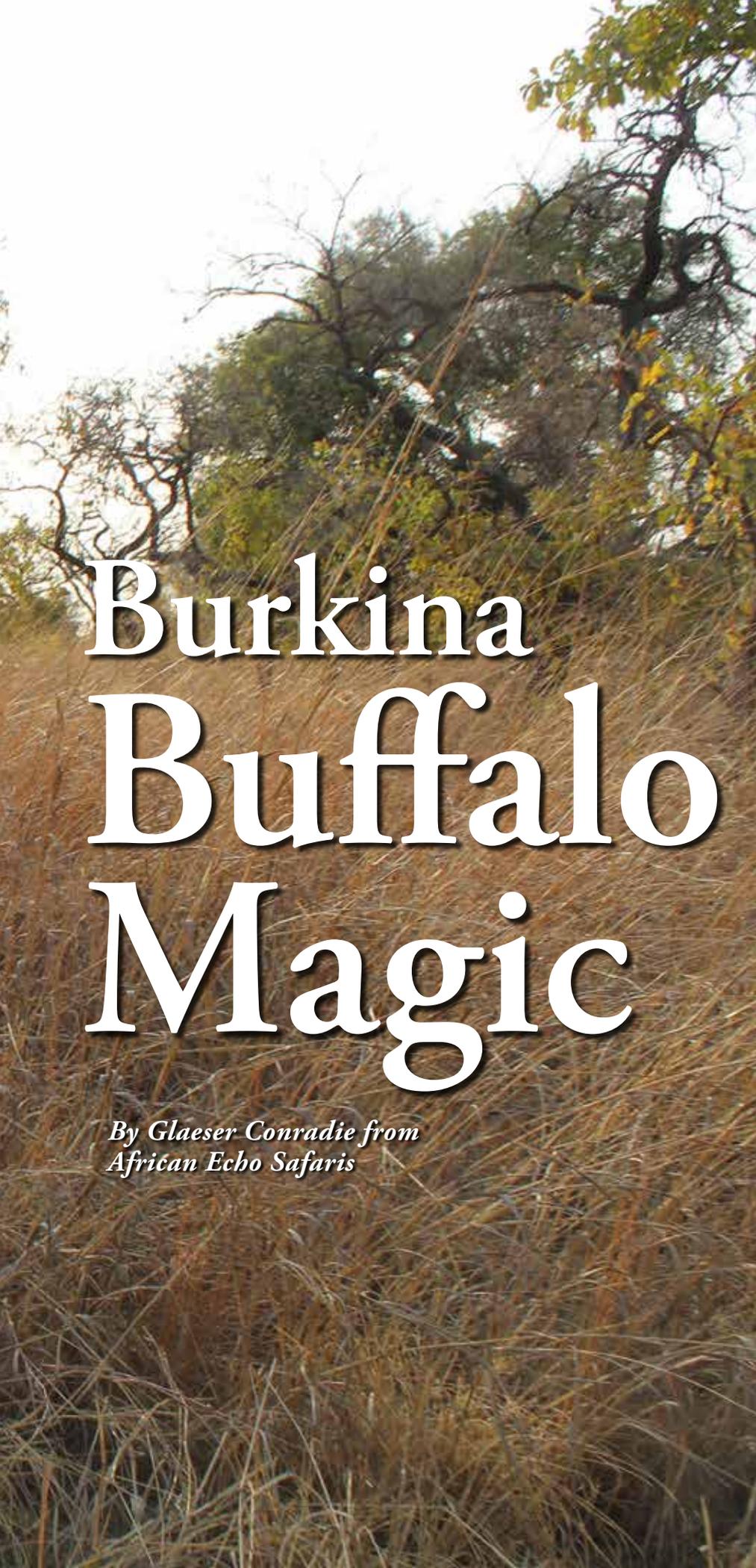


Burkina Faso 2017





Burkina Buffalo Magic

*By Glaeser Conradie from
African Echo Safaris*

The sun was not out yet, but there was just enough light to notice the small herd of buffalo moving slowly across the broken savannah about 500 metres to our right. The Sahara winds crossing over from Mali in the north created a misty sky that contributed to the magic of entering the unknown.

The driver, unaware of the buffalo, continued driving. Everyone on the back was as silent as the night. Buffalo don't seem to mind the Land Cruiser's distant diesel engine rumbling, but any human voices will travel crisply through the early morning air and surely alert them. About 700 metres further, the tracker tapped on the cabin roof of the Cruiser. The wind was perfect. We couldn't mess this up. Although everybody had had a good night's rest, we had walked about 18 km the first day, following two bachelor herds. *The West African sun is merciless and the dry air sucks up all the moisture in your body. At least that's how it feels.*

The sun was barely showing its glancing rays over the baobab-covered horizon, and the early morning air was still cool. Everybody was on high alert. Things happened fast. Within literally a few seconds, everyone was walking in single file on the way to break the line of the approaching buffalo. Christian Jensen was close behind me with his Steyr Mannlicher .375 H&H Magnum. Christian and his lovely wife Vivi, followed perfectly in line. I never needed to correct their positions while stalking – and for good reason, which I was only to find out at the end of the hunt. We didn't have to walk too far in order to be in perfect position. With Christian on the home-made shooting sticks, he was ready – safety off. The herd slowly moved past us about 50 metres away - females, a few calves and a young male. As we got off the vehicle and quickly glassed them, I was sure I saw a bigger body within the herd. Then he appeared at the back of the herd, walking behind a large female.

“The one at the back?” I heard Christian whisper.

“Yes, take him when he's clear.” The female got ahead and the shot went off.

“Reload, safety on and stay right behind

Buffalo Hero pic

The best months for hunting are between January and April. January to March is still reasonable temperaturewise, but the last part of March can get quite hot (40 degrees plus). March and April are good for lion hunting with April getting very hot! The reason is that there are fewer lagoons and waterholes available, which makes it a bit easier to find the lions. Unlike other areas in Africa, baiting for lion is not allowed. We have to track them down. This really offers extremely good hunting!

me,” I said while taking the shooting sticks. We saw the dust dancing around in the misty dawn air as the big old bull stumbled and fell. Although it was a well-placed shot, the buffalo was not yet dead. Christian shot again, and the Norma African PH 300-grain bullet did a perfect job.

Christian, not a man of too many words, was overjoyed, and the setting was perfect for the trophy photos. The sincere joy among the whole team in such a beautiful environment, after such an exciting hunt reminded me once more why I'm so extremely fortunate to do what I do for a living!

With hunting in West Africa, especially Burkina Faso, the animal is seldom quartered in the bush. It is first dragged by the Cruiser to the closest suitable tree, pulled up a few metres from the ground over a thick branch, then is lowered into the vehicle below. Most clients want a shoulder mount, so we try and keep the buffalo on its belly while dragging, with the shoulders off the ground. So if you ever come to hunt buffalo in Burkina Faso, try and shoot it close to a big tree.

We took the buffalo back to camp and had brunch and short rest before returning to the concession. Each member of the team enjoys a coke or beer – the clients, driver, trackers, game scout and me. Sharing hunting moments with the whole team is very much part of the West African hunting tradition. And it's not just a beer and saying “Thank you.” The locals are extremely happy for the client, and relive the hunt in Móorè, their local language. Although French is the most commonly spoken language in Burkina Faso, in the rural areas the local dialect is generally used.

Talking about traditions – West Africa is full of them! With buffalo and especially lion hunting, sacrifices (mostly chickens or goats), strange rituals and prayers are very common. Early morning the vehicle will suddenly stop at the beginning of the concession. I then indicate to the clients to keep quiet, although they are desperate to know why.

“What is going on?!” Then they see the trackers making four small fires a few metres away from



Grilled guinea fowl - West African style.



Caption 2

the hunting vehicle, facing each wind direction. Usually, the head tracker, will sometimes ask for the client's rifle and slowly move it through the smoke. Usually normally leads these ceremonies. Regarding religion, Burkina Faso consists mostly of Catholics and Muslims, but most of the people are animists. Often chicken or goat meat will be placed in trees as an offer to nature. This is all part of the experience. Hunting in Burkina Faso is far more than just a hunt!

Even the drive from Ouagadougou to the

concession, about 280 km southeast of the capital, is an experience. Depending on the state of the roads, the drive can vary between five to seven hours. Photo opportunities are plentiful. Public transport takes on a whole new dimension. Often you will see motorbikes with pigs tied onto the back, taxis with scooters and livestock (from goats to cattle) on the roof, as well as buses transporting literally anything from people to donkeys. An American or European traffic officer would



Caption 3

On a good day we easily see elephant, hippo, crocodile, buffalo, roan antelope, western hartebeest, sing-sing waterbuck, Nigerian bohor reedbuck and western kob. At least once or twice a week we can run into lion. The harnessed bushbuck is a bit shy, but we regularly take beautiful trophies.

have an immediate nervous breakdown!

Anyway, back to the hunt.

Next up was Vivi using the same rifle as her husband and looking for the same trophy as well. We spent the next few days leaving camp after a 04h30 breakfast, following buffalo herds varying from large ones of over a hundred to smaller bachelor herds. The best scenario would be to find a lone old Dagga bull and track him down. Some days we covered up to 20 km and drank up to five litres of water a day. I always advise clients to bring some electrolytes to help supplement lost minerals and salts. It helps a lot to boost energy, especially after a long walk.

Normally around 11h30 it becomes hot, and we relax in the shade close by the Wamou River. Lunchtime while hunting in Burkina Faso is a different experience from other concessions in Africa. You realize that lunch is drawing near when the trackers' attention turns from buffalo

Half page Double page advert

to guinea fowl. I tell the clients that shotguns might be fired from the back of the Cruiser, from approximately 11h00 onwards. Some clients are quite shocked when they realize that they are not the only hunters there, but they get to realize that it is part of the deal in this neck of the woods. The trackers prepare the guinea fowls on a small fire while our packed lunch is served. After we have enjoyed canned sardines, cold pasta salad, bread and boiled eggs, the trackers will offer some of their precious game bird meat. Dressed with olive oil, salt and pepper and served on fresh green leaves, it's really good! Not to mention the ice-cold beer and soft drinks in the cooler box, with fresh fruit for dessert.

Our afternoon naps are often disturbed by hippos snorting nearby in the river, and the ever-present group of vultures that surround us looking for food.

As we left the camp on the last day everybody on the Cruiser knew that it was now or never. We found fresh tracks just before sunrise and followed hard and fast. The sun was just about to rise when the tracker in front of me whispered, "Lions." Great was our surprise when we realized that we and the lions were both stalking the same herd of buffalo! We could hear them roaring in frustration as they trotted off.



Caption 4

About 45 minutes later the herd of buffalo started to feed, moving very slowly. This gave us time to set up and get Vivi into a shooting position. There were two good-sized bulls. One was slightly reddish, and the other, a bigger black bull was behind a bush far to the left of the herd. He was about 70 metres away – we couldn't get any closer. As soon as he appeared, the shot went off. I didn't see any reaction from

the bull or hear any thud sound of the bullet impact.

The herd ran off – as well as Vivi's bull. Vivi is a very good shot, so something was wrong. She assured me that it was a steady shot. We followed up immediately and spent the next 30 minutes looking for blood. We found nothing. Then the game scout pointed out a small tree that Vivi had hit – about 50 cm behind the



Caption 5

buffalo. Everybody was a bit disappointed, Vivi most of all.

We decided to sight the rifle again, have an early lunch and hunt right through the day. It was the last day after all. Sure enough, the rifle was way out. How this happened, we don't know. After quickly bore-sighting the rifle, Vivi put a few perfect shots in a target at 50 metres. No time to over-analyze the situation; we had to get a buffalo.

Roughly 20 minutes after leaving our early picnic spot, we saw a herd of Dagga bulls a good 200 metres away. The wind was right and they were staring at us through some tall grass. We remained motionless for them to calm down and let get off the truck. After about 20 minutes following their tracks, the tracker indicated that they had joined a bigger herd of buffalo. Not the perfect situation, but we continued for another hour and a half. Again the herd slowed down to feed. This was around 16h30. We didn't have much time left. We

As Burkina Faso is not too far north of the equator, dusk turns to night very quickly.

found an old bull more or less in the middle of the spread-out herd of buffalo. This time the distance was about 90 meters and again we probably would have given our presence away by stalking any closer. We put Vivi on the sticks, and I took a few seconds explaining exactly which buffalo to take. Just as the shot went off, it moved.

Missed again! Everybody was quiet. I felt sorry for Vivi. We were hunting so hard together as a team and everyone felt her disappointment. As I put my hand on her shoulder for some reassurance, the tracker pulled me by the arm pointing at the herd of

buffalo slowing down. A few hundred metres on, they had started to walk. They probably didn't see, hear or smell us, and were getting relaxed before sunset. I told Vivi to reload and put the safety on. She was more than ready to oblige! We followed as quickly as possible until we spotted the herd moving slowly through some broken bush. This time they were all mixed up and it was extremely difficult to identify an older bull. They were constantly moving – although slowly – and it was not easy to identify one and take a shot. The herd was about 50 metres away. The time was 17h20 – very close to our cut-off time. As Burkina Faso is not too far north of the equator, dusk turns to night very quickly.

We put Vivi on the sticks. Suddenly the game scout vigorously started pointing at a buffalo roughly in the middle of the herd. "It's an old bull," one whispered. How these guys can identify the animals without binoculars, I don't know. We confirmed exactly which buffalo to take. *This was it.* The shot went off and the buffalo went down on the spot. I immediately told Vivi to reload and stay right behind me while approaching the fallen animal. Experience tells that when a buffalo goes down, it definitely does not mean that he is not still extremely dangerous, let alone dead. After making sure that everything was safe and the job was well done, we let go.

Vivi was in heaven! And so was her husband. I turned to Vivi and gave her a solid kiss on the cheek. "You have your buffalo," I said. High-fives and congratulations were going around while the hero of the day, the game scout, went off to call the driver.

"One of the best hunts of my life," Vivi said while we were positioning the buffalo for photos. The light was fading fast and we worked quickly.

It was then that Christian and Vivi told me they are both qualified professional hunters as well. Hunting is their passion. A few things started to make sense to me. They were really both very hard-working hunters and I never had to tell them what to do.

On the way back to camp, a good two hours' drive, everybody was quiet for a while. With a cold one in hand, we needed to relive the perfect end to a safari, from different perspectives, I'm sure, but all with a happy ending.

Burkina Faso provides some of the best hunting in Africa and combined with the friendly people of this West African country, makes for a unique hunting experience. The accommodation is modest and basic (with air-conditioning and daily laundry service). The food is reasonable to good but nothing beats the hunting!

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Caption 6

Burkina Faso is a brilliant example of the direct influence hunting has on conservation. As in many other African countries, most of the wildlife unfortunately is only to be found in the hunting blocks. These are normally the only areas regularly patrolled against poaching. There are a few national parks but in most cases a lack



Caption 7

of funds results in inadequate anti-poaching efforts.

African Echo Safaris have been hunting this 260 000 ha concession in the Eastern Province of Burkina Faso for seven years. The concession is for real hunters – it's open, it's challenging, and definitely mystical!

Professional Hunter and Hunting Outfitter, Glaeser Conradie, a member of SCI, PHASA and ACP (Confirmé), is a qualified and licensed dangerous-game hunter and experienced field guide. African Echo Safaris operates in Burkina Faso, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. 🇳🇵

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