



Lion Dog Digest

Sponsored by the
Rhodesian Ridgeback International Foundation

We start off this issue of the *Lion Dog Digest (LDD)* with a picture which typifies the cautious attitude of a working Rhodesian Ridgeback. He has carefully approached a very dead skull on which we have placed a pair of horns taken from an unfortunate rhino that met up with poachers. There is no doubt whatsoever that life is totally absent from that object in front of him, but you only believe that when you have checked it out. Shashanga Matjulu is very experienced in coping with rhino and enjoys several sightings of them on a daily basis. Every time he exits the gate he will cross spoor less than 12 hours old. He lives close to Bergendal and there are probably 100 rhino resident in the area.

Though they are large and powerful, he has no fear of them whatsoever and will happily and courteously escort them out of the way if they happen to be impeding foot-work carried out by his human. To the untrained eye the attitude of these ridgies to large and powerful wild animals may appear to be somewhat nonchalant and laid back. Quite the opposite is the case, and another good example of their state of preparedness is the sideways stance adopted by Chiva when he has a stationary elephant seven metres ahead of him.



Matjulu and a rhino skull.

In the last issue of the *LDD*, when describing a hundred mongooses crossing the Ingwelala campsite, we referred to them as being like 'Hamlet's rats'. Obviously we should have used the word Hamelin instead. And before someone jumps on me for incorrect spelling, let's put down Hameln also.

You cannot be blamed for wondering why we pay so much attention to elephant, particularly in recent issues of your *LDD*, and we enlarge on this matter further later on. The fact is that it is the leading bone of contention among all the wildlife arguments in South Africa at present, and will remain so until a satisfactory solution can be found to the vexing matter of over-population. The excess number of humans is a common problem in Africa, and the rest of the world makes strenuous efforts to address the food shortages, for which it is in no way responsible. So there is nothing abnormal in African terms to be faced with a situation where consumption far exceeds available food resources. In addition, the devastation caused by elephant is restricted to localised spots, and though it might well take more than 50 years to recover in specific circumstances, there are large areas which have suffered no damage at all. However, one must remember that the population explosion is increasing at a rate of a hundred elephant a month, based on earlier surveys and estimations about what the Kruger National Park (KNP) can carry on a sustainable basis. Further, we all know that Africa is subject to variable weather patterns, and though the position may not look so frighteningly grave at this particular moment, who knows what the next rain season will bring. Or to put it in human terms, what happens to the starving millions of people throughout Africa should the American grain crop fail for two years. For the elephant it is our rain pattern that counts, and it seems to be far more susceptible and variable than in the rest of the world.

But to return to our dogs, they are part of the elephants' world, and vice versa. Further, there remains a possibility that we can give some relief to the position by using them to herd small groups to less burdened areas. We must just wait and see what develops.



Chiva and friend.

We continue with two versions of the story concerning Bruce Leslie and his somewhat hair-raising brush with death at the teeth of a leopard just over a year ago. The first appeared in a local newspaper and the second was published in the national press. It is also worth noting the comments about leopard attacks. We tend to make much mention of lion in such matters, but really they don't enter the frame. If memory serves me correctly, during the last 20 years, there have been 20 leopard attacks primarily in the KNP and its environs, and about 10 were fatal. There have been four deaths in the last five years. In comparable circumstances and time, the proud lion is not responsible for one single corpse. Of course the figures could be quite different for the illegal immigrants who come from Mozambique and use the Park as a shortcut. Here, the numbers and predators involved are exceedingly vague, but attempts are always made to track down guilty parties whenever these incidents are discovered. Such is the world of our working Ridgebacks.

One last item of news is the establishment of a website dedicated to the working Rhodesian Ridgeback. Operating as www.liondogs.org.za, it will continue along much the same lines as your *LDD*, but it will hopefully attract more of an international flavour. I'm sure most people do not realise just how far our modern Ridgeback has moved from his origins during the last 100 years. It is not just a matter of getting the character and physique right, you don't have the correct environment in which to raise and teach him about life. The only place around which bears any reasonable similarity is the KNP, and it is not about to open its fences to all manner of ridgie lovers. Problems. Problems.

MAN AND LEOPARD FIGHT TO THE DEATH

In the *Lowvelder* of 23 December 2003, Buks Viljoen wrote as follows:

Malelane – His natural instinct to survive in the bush probably saved the life of a 40-year-old Kruger National Park (KNP) game ranger when he was attacked by an injured leopard on Thursday afternoon.

The incident took place only 150m from the staff camp near Malelane entrance gate. Mr Bruce Leslie, who has been a ranger in KNP for the past 14 years, on Friday told how he had pushed his left hand into the animal's mouth to stop it from biting him in the face.

Leslie said some of his rangers had seen the female leopard, described as being in 'poor condition', in the vicinity of the staff village during the past week. "We knew that the animal must have been injured somehow, because of her unhealthy condition." On Wednesday, staff members saw the leopard trying in vain to catch a monkey right next to the camp fence. Late Thursday afternoon, a ranger, who saw the leopard close to the camp, called Leslie. Armed with an R-1 rifle and accompanied by his trusty Rhodesian Ridgeback, Matjulu, Leslie walked in the direction of the spot where it was last seen.

"I noticed Matjulu circle around and knew that he must have picked up the animal's scent. The next moment he stopped dead in his tracks staring into the bush in front of him," Leslie told *Lowvelder* from his bed at Nelspruit Medi-Clinic. He knelt down to be on the same level as the dog and see what it was seeing. "I was looking about 30m ahead of the dog, but the next moment I saw the animal only 15m away. The moment our eyes met, she stormed."

Instinctively he lifted his rifle and fired three shots. He saw that the animal was on top of him and shoved his left hand into its gaping mouth. It ploughed into him, forcing him over backwards. "I still had the rifle in my right hand and fired again." The leopard landed on top of him. "I could feel her grip on my hand weaken and I knew that she was dead."

He rolled the animal off him and then saw that Matjulu was standing about 20m behind him. His left index finger was badly broken in the attack and he had deep lacerations on his hand and legs. In its dying moments the leopard had scratched Leslie's legs with its hind claws. During an emergency operation at Medi-Clinic doctors had to reconstruct his left finger. "But I am positive that it will recover completely and that I will regain the full use of my hand," he said.

In all his years of service at KNP he had been charged by numerous wild animals, among them lion as well as leopard, but never before had he had such a close shave, Leslie said with relief.

The carcass was taken to Skukuza for a post-mortem. "It was found that the animal's lower jaw was broken and that the last time it had fed was about five or six days previously," said KNP spokesman, Raymond Travers.

On the front page of its issue dated 20 December 2003, *The Citizen* reported as follows under the heading "Ranger wrestles off rogue leopard and slays it":

Malelane – A Kruger National Park (KNP) ranger thrust his left hand into a leopard's mouth to prevent the animal from biting him further, while shooting it, using his right hand, the KNP said yesterday.

Bruce Leslie, a section ranger, received reports about a possible problem leopard in the vicinity of the staff accommodation complex near Malelane, and went to investigate at around 5p.m. on Thursday, Park spokesman Raymond Travers said.

"When he reached the area where the leopard was last seen, Mr Leslie saw his dog, which was ahead of him, freeze and look in the direction of the bush. He quickly got to that position and looked in that direction, only to look straight into the eyes of a leopard, only about 10m away from him," Travers said.

"At that instant, the leopard leapt towards him and he shoved his left hand into the leopard's mouth to prevent it biting him further while firing his R-1 rifle at the animal with his right hand." The leopard bit into the index finger of Leslie's left hand and clawed the ranger's legs with its hind paws before becoming limp.

"I realised then that I had probably killed the leopard," Mr Leslie told Travers from his bed at Nelspruit Medi-Clinic. His condition was described as stable. Doctors have operated on his left hand.

A post mortem on the adult female leopard indicated that it had a broken jaw at the time of the attack, and



Bruce and Matjulu.

was not in good condition. Skukuza veterinary surgeon Lin-Mari de Klerk said: “It was bitten by another animal, which broke its lower jawbone, and it had not eaten for at least four days because of this injury.”

- In August this year, a leopard killed a nine-year-old boy, Tshikani Nobela, who was walking in an unfenced staff village at Skukuza.
- A woman suffered a similar fate two years earlier while jogging in the village.
- The body of a man, apparently a poacher, was mauled by a leopard in the park after he had been killed by an elephant in April.
- In May, park ranger Joseph Mathebula was attacked by a leopard while he was in the veld checking a herd of antelope for foot-and-mouth disease. He managed to kill the animal with an axe.
- A leopard jumped at Henry van Eck, a private tour guide, in an open game-viewing vehicle near Satara in September and bit him on his arms and legs. The leopard was culled, which sparked an outcry at the time. In a subsequent report on the incident, SA National Parks said it had concluded the leopard was accustomed to humans, possibly from having been fed before, and posed a threat to the safety of visitors and staff.

DEATH OF A POACHER

Buks Viljoen reported in *The Citizen* of 1 November 2003 that a Mozambican poacher was mauled to death near Tshokwane, in the Kruger National Park, after being involved in a skirmish with the police. Members of the South African Police Service, the Mozambican police, as well as field rangers of the Park, were lying in ambush after information about possible smuggling and poaching in the area. At around 2a.m. on Thursday, two of the rangers, who were waiting near the Rietspruit road, saw movement in the dense bush. They also saw flashlights.

When the suspects came closer the two rangers confronted them. The rangers fired warning shots and heard the suspects run into the bush. A few minutes later they heard someone scream. They drove closer in their vehicle and found a full-grown male lion standing over a body. They



chased the lion away to discover the bloodied body of one of the suspects. At daybreak, a search was conducted and police found two AK-47 rifles, a Nagant rifle as well as live ammunition.

The police, following leads on the scene, found more arms and ammunition in a follow-up operation. More arrests are expected over the weekend.

ELEPHANT KILLER

In this issue of the *Lion Dog Digest* we rely heavily on the lay-press for subject matter.

For some inexplicable reason the general public seems to be falling into increasingly close contact with many of the wild animals. The results have on certain occasions been somewhat disastrous, and a few people have died, particularly at the feet of elephant. There is no justification for the public to come into such dangerously close proximity with these wild animals. One can only assume that some of the victims are not as aware of the dangers as they should be.

However we start off with a story that concerns an employee of a private reserve, in other words someone who has a good knowledge of the issues involved. It includes reference to one of the most serious errors involved in translocating elephant; young bulls were spread around the country without accompanying mature bulls and went out of control. It caused the death of more than 50 rhino. This story appeared in *The Citizen* of

Wednesday, 31 March 2004, written by Jill Gowans, and was headlined “Jumbo Kills Guide”:

The young manager of the Umfolozi Wilderness Trails, Fortune Mkhize, was trampled to death by an elephant yesterday as he was leading eight tourists into the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) game reserve’s wilderness area.

He was the nephew of Khulani Mkhize, CEO of KZN Wildlife.

Jeff Gaisford, of KZN Wildlife, said the group had spent the first night of the four-day trail at Mndindini base camp near the tourist camp of Impila. The group set out yesterday and encountered a lone elephant which showed signs of aggression. Mr Mkhize signaled to the ranger to instruct the group to move slowly away, which they did. Without warning, the elephant charged and killed him.

Said Mr Gaisford: “The elephant is still at large, but our field staff are tracking it.”

On Friday, 2 April 2004, the selfsame reporter, Jill Gowans, produced a follow-up story to the above under the heading “Killer jumbo ‘delinquent’”. We then found out a lot more of the background to the incident. When these wild animals are translocated from their accustomed habitat, there can be some terrifyingly serious consequences. The rhino in the Pilanesberg reserves suffered this lesson at great personal cost, and it all goes to prove that these grand schemes of man can embody some totally unexpected flaws which cause tremendous fallout. The fix for this specific problem is now extremely well-known and documented. But it all goes to show that there will always be particularly challenging aspects to game management, and more must be learnt with each new measure. The story is continued as follows:



The bull elephant that killed a young wilderness trails manager in the Umfolozi game reserve on Tuesday is believed to be a so-called Kruger Park delinquent. These are young orphans spared from culling in the 1980s and relocated to the KZN park and Pilanesberg.

Lacking normal herd structure, they come into premature musth or sexual aggression, visible as ‘weeping’ from glands on their foreheads. Over the past decade, they have killed more than 50 rhino in Hluhluwe-Umfolozi park. The introduction of some mature Kruger bulls to the park three years ago, which solved a similar problem in Pilanesberg, was thought to be working as the older bulls exert their dominance over the youngsters.

Fortune Mkhize (27), was killed when an elephant charged the trail group he was leading. The elephant, confirmed to be in musth, is now being tracked. Jeff Gaisford of KZN Wildlife, said if it was positively identified, it was likely to be put down, unless it had an injury. “There is evidence that elephant and lion, once they have killed a human are likely to do so again,” he said. “But in 50 years of wilderness trails, only nine have been shot.”

Then on 7 April, we read the latest about the delinquent elephant. The heading is now “Photographs will help track rogue elephant”, and the content is thus:

Photographs taken by tourists minutes before the fatal attack at the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park last week will play a vital role in identifying which of three elephant bulls was responsible for the death. Wilderness trail manager Fortune Mkhize was killed while leading a group of British and American tourists away from an elephant bull.

“We have to find out if the animal is injured – this will make it more aggressive and a danger to the humans,” said park manager Craig Read. “They (the photographs) were taken just before the attack and will help us decide which of three animals attacked Fortune,” he said. “If it is in good condition, no harm will come to it.”

Well, we didn’t learn what the elephant’s fate was, but we hadn’t been given enough time to forget about that episode when we read on 5 May again, in an article by Buks Viljoen, that an “Elephant tramples ecologist to death”. The story of this most unfortunate incident reads as follows:

An elephant trampled an ecologist to death at Lions Sand camp in the Sabi Sand Reserve yesterday. Lodge owner Nic More was among the first to get to the scene of the tragedy at 9:30a.m.

The Citizen was told the woman was killed about 100m from a chalet in the luxurious private camp after the animal suddenly emerged from the dense bush. Her name cannot be revealed until her next of kin have been informed.

Lions Sand is part of a strip between Sabi Sand and the Kruger National Park. Kruger Park spokesman Raymond Travers said the park was told of the incident, but could do no more than offer help because the incident did not take place in the Kruger Park. Lodge staff called Netcare 911 in Nelspruit, requesting an ambulance to remove the body. But the paramedic on duty said police should rather be summoned. Police in Hazyview confirmed they were called out.

The elephant has been shot.

“Death is a big loss to conservation” was the heading Buks Viljoen used in his report which appeared on Friday, 7 May 2004. Further details about the loss of the ecologist at Lion Sands Lodge are as follows:

She lived her passion for the bush and conservation. She knew elephants and studied them. Kay Hiscocks, the 42-year-old ecologist who was killed by an elephant earlier this week, indeed died the way she lived. Ms Hiscocks will be buried in the bush near the Lion Sands Lodge where she worked for the past 10 years, today. Miss Hiscocks was killed instantly on Tuesday when an elephant cow surprised her on the banks of the Sabie river and trampled her to death. A mystery surrounded the presence of the elephants, as the lodge



where she was killed was fenced in with the purpose of keeping elephants out, said lodge owner Nic More.

Miss Hiscocks was working as an ecologist at the Lion Sands camp in the world-renowned Sabi Sands Game Reserve. Mr More was the first person on the scene where Ms Hiscocks was killed. She had been busy with alien plant control on the banks of the river when she was surprised by the sudden appearance of the three elephants. The cow immediately stormed down on her. She was knocked down and died when the animal mauled her. Gavin Hulett, warden of the Sabi Sands Reserve, said Ms Hiscocks was well qualified and experienced in her work, and described her death as an unavoidable and extremely unfortunate accident.

She was killed about 100m from the nearest chalet in the luxury private camp. "There is an elephant-proof fence around the lodge and how the three animals got inside is a mystery," Mr More told *The Citizen* yesterday. "We have a strict policy that any staff member who works out in the field should either be armed or at least have an armed guard with them. But because the lodge was fenced in it wasn't necessary for Kay to be armed. She was totally unaware of the presence of these animals."

After the attack on Ms Hiscocks, the elephant fled and broke out through the fencing. The 25-year-old cow was later tracked down and shot. The Lions Sands Reserve forms part of the greater conservancy between the Sabi Sands Reserve and the Kruger National Park.

"Apart from our personal grief, the animals in our reserve have also suffered the loss of a devoted and passionate protector," Mr More said. Adrian Lowe, national chairman of Field Guide Association of SA, said Ms Hiscocks had had a great impact on the industry, and her death was a big loss for conservation.

In-between the elephant incidents above, the Kruger was having its own bit of trouble. On Friday, 16 April, we read from a report by Buks Viljoen that "Rhinos hurt two in park". That item goes as follows:

A visitor to the Kruger National Park and a KNP tracker were seriously injured yesterday when a group of hikers, on a walking trail in the Eastern part of the park, was attacked by three rhinoceroses.

One of the KNP trackers who escorted the group, Elias Chauke, was lifted clear off the ground when a rhino slammed his massive horn into his body. When the animal, still with Mr Chauke trapped between his horns, stormed past the leader guide, Dumisani Zwane, Mr Zwane smacked the animal on the head with his rifle. The animal then dropped Mr Chauke, whose right hand and several ribs were broken.

The other rhinoceroses charged at the group of bewildered tourists, among them an American citizen on his first visit to southern Africa. A Mr Botha (who would not give his first name) from Vereeniging was gaffed in the back and buttocks. The tourists were walking in the area near the Byamiti private camp, in the vicinity of Crocodile Bridge, when they were attacked.

KNP spokesman Raymond Travers said it was suspected the hikers inadvertently trapped the three



rhinoceroses against a bend in the Byamiti riverbed. When they couldn't get out, the animals charged at the tourists. Mr Botha suffered deep lacerations to the lower parts of his body.

A doctor, Russouw Ferreira, was airlifted from Skukuza to treat the two injured. The patients were then airlifted by the KNP helicopter to the Afsaal picnic site, near the Malelane gate, where they were transferred to the care of paramedics from Netcare 911 in Nelspruit.

On 10 February 2004, Buks Viljoen reported in *The Citizen* about an unfortunate incident involving a young child and a crocodile. The story was headlined "Croc grabs boy: search is on".

Teams consisting of farm workers, policemen and members of the Mpumalanga Parks Board are searching the banks of the Crocodile River near Malelane after a 13-year-old child was taken by a crocodile. Police Inspector Potte van den Bergh, of Malelane, said police were called out to the river on Saturday night. The children who had accompanied the missing child said they were fishing in a shallow part of the river.

A large crocodile apparently sneaked up on the boy and dragged him under water. The children ran to the nearby compound for help. Since then search parties have been patrolling the banks of the river, but no trace of the boy has been found. Inspector Van den Bergh said the search has been hampered by the fact that the area of the river where the child had been taken was inhabited by at least 10 large crocodiles.

The Kruger National Park (KNP) reported that two field guides, Gordon Ramsden and Mphadeni Nthangeni, saved the life of a British tourist after an elephant attacked him and a group of predominantly foreign tourists on a day-walk in the wilderness area on the banks of the N'waswitshaka River about 15km from Skukuza on Tuesday morning.

"It was a normal walk," said Gordon shortly after the incident. "I briefed my guests completely and started to walk in a northerly direction when I saw a breeding herd of elephants fairly close to us." To be on the safe side, Gordon and his back-up guide, Mphadeni rebriefed the tourists on elephant behaviour and requested that they stick close to the guides. The group was then able to view the herd for about five minutes before the herd moved on.



We start them pretty young.

"I was busy telling the guests about elephant behaviour when, out of nowhere, an elephant charged us from behind. The group split up and six of the tourists came with me while the rest went with Mphadeni. The elephant came past me and brushed two of the tourists before turning around on one of the tourists," he explained. "At that moment, I thought I was dead," said John Anslow from Stafford, United Kingdom. "I was lying on the ground with the elephant virtually on top of me and then I heard the shots and the elephant slumped to the ground on my right." A bullet from one of the guides' rifles penetrated the brain, instantly killing the animal before it could kill Anslow. "I owe my life to the quick action of the KNP guides and am relieved that they are so well trained," concluded Anslow.

Now you may question why we report on these incidents, even though they may make for interesting copy, are they really pertinent? Well we think that they are, and the reasons are simply given.

Firstly, we are often asked what training are the Ridgebacks given before being drafted into service. This is a difficult one to field because there are no methods by which you can expose the dogs to the risks involved without it becoming a real-time experience. There are no training schools, there are no tame wild animals which are going to pull their punches so that our dogs survive the learning curve. There is no such thing as virtual reality; you only get real reality in real time. All the rangers can do is to not put the dogs in a

position they think the dogs can't handle. Now this is where they (the rangers, as much as the dogs) win because they base their approach on the capabilities of the other regular breeds, and the Ridgies outperform them completely. So our dogs, right from the start, are cosseted far more than is required by even the most adventurous attitude of the rangers. So the dogs start off with a substantial safety factor in their favour.

And so it has proved to be. But I am sure that you readers have noticed that what caused the above problems was the unexpected nature of the dangers. You cannot programme (train) survival techniques into these dogs, life is one long survival exercise. And that is why the Ridgie reigns supreme. He is a survivor, and he is adaptable, flexible, adjustable, and anything else that is required to ensure that survival regardless of whatever happens or whatever environmental demands there might be.

It has been a great privilege for me to deal with these rangers of the KNP. They are real people dealing with real life and they have real (honest) opinions. So when it comes to an answer of how they train the dogs for their duties I shall give their simple answer. They all freely admit that they do not know how to train a dog, but the dog does what they want. It is all too simple and straightforward, the dog does the correct thing.

I am no hero, and you don't need to be the proverbial 'rocket scientist' to know that there are lots of nasties in that KNP. So when I travel around there with wife and children I don't even think of getting out of my vehicle, or consider whether a family member can, except in designated areas, and then only in a very conservative manner. You still automatically check out the area.

But when you have a couple of Ridgies on the back of the bakkie (light delivery vehicle) you give them a cursory glance before hopping out to deal with whatever problem needs attention. If there is anything untoward nearby, you expect to receive clear indications from them; and you also expect them to know all that is going on for at least 200m distant around you, without getting off to check for themselves. To merely have them there provides a remarkably strong psychological comfort, and they don't let you down.

When you read earlier about Bruce Leslie, you learnt how a young male called Matjulu located a dangerous leopard before his very experienced human did, and thereby saved his human from becoming the intended meal. Matjulu was taken to the scene for exposure, but the unexpected happened (the unexpected is what you can count on), and his human had to rely on the expertise of his Ridgie for his survival. But it was close.

So, my conclusion on this facet, we have no training programme, but we count on them coming up trumps.

The second reason why we give you these incidents is because, right from the start, we had certain objectives in mind. It was made clear that these dogs would make for deep water whenever they saw it, and that meant sudden death (crocodile). It was also made clear that they would wish to put all monkeys, and particularly Baboon, on the endangered list, again a cause for their demise. But in spite of these drawbacks, it was made abundantly clear that they would (a) give adequate forewarning of nearby and approaching danger, (b) distract and impede the advance of any nastie (in fact Dusty stops them – lion elephant rhino etc – in their tracks with a growl, which is more than anyone could have hoped for), and (c) track and herd errant elephant back home into the KNP.

Further it was recommended that anyone who was on foot outside camp and compound facilities



No, they did not accompany the rangers on their anti-poacher operation. But could they?

should have a Ridgie off lead at heel. I don't think anyone took the elephant herding theory at all seriously, but now, six or seven years later, it has been shown that the Ridgeback is possessed of potential in this area. As far as equipping all on foot with canine company is concerned, there are obviously practical problems which inhibit broad applicability greatly, but who is to say that all these incidents would have occurred in spite of the presence of Ridgebacks. One consequence that cannot be denied is that all and sundry would have been informed of impending disaster. Now this does not guarantee prevention of the horrible developments from taking place; all the dogs can do from here on is to postpone the issue and, in certain cases only, to bring matters to a happy conclusion. At this stage much will depend on what the humans do. But however you look at it, the human's chances of survival are greatly enhanced, and isn't that what the whole exercise is about?

Probably the one common thread that runs through all these incidents is the unexpected nature of the occurrence. The human did not realise it would happen there and then, and is usually unaware of the train of events until it is already too late. The Ridgeback has a totally different mindset – he is always and perpetually on a survival mission, and that is why Cornelius van Rooyen was so taken by these dogs a hundred years ago, they bayed lion and survived. All the descriptions given of their techniques indicate a desire on their part to bay, and to bay another day. They were not there to bite and kill.

If they are to survive the rigours of the bush, they will ensure that the humans survive also. There is no limit on how far they will go in defending their humans, it depends only on the strength of the bond.

So analyse these newspaper articles and decide for yourself what difference a companion Rhodesian Ridgeback could have made.

PRESERVING THE HUNTING QUALITIES OF THE RHODESIAN RIDGEBACK

A short report about Ridgeback hunting in Germany from RR Club ELSA.

Hunting with dogs is a sensitive subject and each country has its own game laws and hunting methods. Germany has a very long tradition in hunting with dogs, and it is a serious occupation, not a sport. It opens up very different possibilities for dogs in the assistance to, and companion of, hunters. A good many of the laws and regulations protect game and dogs in the working arena. One of these laws requires that every dog used in hunting must pass an official hunting examination. German hunters must also do a difficult hunting examination. The powerful Hunting Dog Association (JGHV) controls the breeding and examining of hunting dogs in Germany. This Association works together with the German Hunting Association and doesn't accept the Rhodesian Ridgeback as a real hunting dog. More and more they exclude participation by Ridgebacks in these official hunting examinations in Germany. This is a big problem for the German Ridgeback hunter.

In 1963, the German hunter, farmer and RR-breeder, Carl-Ludwig von Geibler, returned to Germany after a long life of farming in south-west Africa, accompanied by his first Ridgebacks. His Kennel 'Aus dem Skaaprevier' was very important for Ridgebacks of good hunting and guarding qualities in Germany. Mr Von Geibler supported Ridgeback hunting till his early death in 1984. Many RRs have been very successful in hunting work performed by private and professional hunters in Germany over the years.

Sadly, because of non-acceptance by the German Hunting Association, a number of hunters in recent years have given up using Ridgebacks. Germany has one of the world's most famous hunting examination systems for dogs, and we think it would be fair and reasonable for the RR breed to participate in it. This is a difficult goal for the German RR Club ELSA.

We, from the ELSA Board are all hunters and breeders. Many of us have enjoyed excellent experiences with Ridgebacks in the role of a hunter's companion over the years. We believe that it is very important for the breed to maintain its original qualities in hunting work, and hope to find more people who think the same way worldwide. It would be really fantastic, and important for breeding, to have additional 'working bloodlines' in the future. We know that this is a long way off.

We have been working for four years in the Club towards our own hunting test system for

Ridgebacks, and for acceptance of the Rhodesian Ridgeback in the German hunting scene. A famous German scent-hound trainer, with much professional experience, helps us with this work. By using special methods we train dogs and hunters in blood tracking for wounded game. The Ridgeback is very good at this work – he possesses an excellent combination of scent- and sight-hound qualities with an understanding of game and danger. But that is only one area in which this breed is fantastic. In October 2003, we had our own first blood tracking examination with three official hunting dog judges from other hunting dog breeds. We tested nine well-trained RRs and all were most successful. Two of the males were over nine years old, and they now have the chance to demonstrate to an official hunting dog judge team just what they can do. In June 2004, we conducted our second official blood-tracking test which was more difficult than the first one, and all participants were again successful. We are very proud of these results, because organising an official club hunting examination is very difficult in Germany with its non-acceptance of ‘non-hunting breed’ attitude. We think we are the first FCI/RR club to accomplish this. The proven performance of the breed impressed the official German hunting dog judges.



Jessica and friend.

But it is our experience that not all Ridgebacks can do this work. A few of them are gun-shy, have other problems with their nerves, or are too afraid (not to be confused with careful!) of game. So Club ELSA organises an official temperament and gunshot test for all RRs used for breeding.

We hope the Ridgeback will again become popular for basic hunting work. It would help to preserve this wonderful breed with its innate qualities. For hunting work the dogs need very good nerves and instincts, quick reactions, good healthy bodies, sound common sense, and intelligence. These all are original qualities of RRs formed in the African bush in the early days; but the preservation of these characteristics is not possible in the show-ring alone. The breed must be at ‘work’ again.

Finally, working with dogs in the hunting environment is a very responsible affair – responsible with regard to the dogs, the game, and the general public. Love for dogs, game, and nature are very important for this job – it is a basic requirement. But this alone isn’t enough – acknowledgement and experience in dogs, dog handling and hunting make the work a success. We from Club ELSA want to sponsor this approach, and with this little article send greetings around the world to all interested RR friends and hunters.

Special thanks to the RRIF team for their important work and good luck for the working Lion Dog Group at Kruger National Park – we have great respect for the dangers they encounter daily.

Here are the names of the RRs which passed Club ELSA hunting examinations:

- Elan vom Bärenkopf – Ambra v. Bärenkopf x Aaron Ogni
- Dee Dakota of Dao Phu Quoc – Balou of Dao Phu Quoc x Cartouche Anandu
- Farasi Epesi Aranga – Galikwe Akiba x Ando v. d. Garvensburg
- Farasi Epesi Atiba – Galikwe Akiba x Ando v. d. Garvensburg
- Ithemba Akina – Ajuga v. d. Garvensburg x Makaranga Hurricane
- Makololo Achojah Mokoro – Shangani Binti Bahati x Umvutcha Matobo
- N’doki Ashanti – Ariela von Dambuki x Besal Golden Rule
- Shashanga Mavukani – Chipangali’s Madanha x Pronkberg Chidza of Shashanga *
- Aysha v. Sauzahn – Lisa x Johokwe Huambo

- Umvuma Le Cito – Umhlandla Ucelemba of Janak x Helderidge Chivi.
(* This dog was whelped in the Kruger National Park.)

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THE BIG ELEPHANT INDABA

In the *Kruger Park Times* of 3 November 2004, the general approach to the Big Elephant Indaba was put forward in its full complexity. This is an extremely detailed exposition which has been prepared in an effort to provide the viewpoints of all the major role players. It covers at least four pages (over 2 500 words) and it will be made available to anyone who is interested, but I think you deserve a break now from that particular topic.



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