

Guide to Bow Hunting Kudu

by PH Kruger Herman

Equipment

Although an adult kudu bull is a large antelope (250 – 300 kg), it is the long legs that make it look big. They are not bulky, but rather slim and thin; the required minimum penetration to the vitals is about 10 inches.

Bow draw weight in the 60-lb to 70-lb class is adequate. Arrow weight from 475 grains and more should penetrate deep enough for a humane kill.

Despite my hunters who were successful with bows with draw weights in the 50-lb range, I prefer bows 60 lbs plus. A lower poundage bow requires that the hides be placed not farther than 18 yards; that the hunter uses a heavy enough arrow; and that the hunter shoots accurately enough to place that arrow on the proverbial 'tickey'.

Usually women bow hunters struggle to draw heavier bows, and therefore I make sure they shoot accurately and their arrows fly flawlessly. A straight-flying arrow makes up for the lower poundage of a bow - within boundaries. An arrow flying crooked has less advantage for proper penetration, even if you shoot it from a heavy poundage bow.

Education on shot placement is paramount. Touching the meaty part on the back of the shoulder in the lower third of the body will penetrate the heart/lung area and result in either a haemothorax or a pneumothorax, killing the animal within seconds.

Broad heads

Multiple or flat broadheads of proper design, sharpened to shaving sharpness and well aligned with the arrow, are deadly.

Broadheads like Zwickey, Magnus, Muzzy, Thunderhead, to name a few, are all well constructed and strong. Depending on the bow-arrow combination, any of these would work well.

Hunting methods

Spot, walk, stalk: Very difficult, but possible. Clothes should complement the vegetation colour. Always cover your face and hands. You might get away with blue jeans, but bare hands and face are a dead giveaway in the bush.

Use binoculars to spot kudu from higher vantage points and keep the wind in your face. Kudu can be stalked, and late afternoons are better as the kudu seem calmer. Never move quickly. Kudu appear to move in slow motion, can stand dead still for long periods, and can browse a single tree for a long time, during which they can be invincible.

Longer shots need practice. A laser rangefinder is a necessary tool, as misjudging distance by a mere 3-5 yards can result in a wound or a miss.

Hides and tree stands

Wind and motion are your biggest enemies; and you get only so many opportunities at a large kudu bull. If detected, your hunt is over. That bull will never come in there again.

Stay in the hide or stand until a vehicle picks you up. Animals are used to vehicles on game farms; but if an animal spots you, it will not come close to the hide again.

Elevation is an important factor as it assists in hiding human scent. Six metres is the minimum height for the platform or floor of the hide or stand.

Make sure wind direction is well worked out. In South Africa, the wind is generally from the same direction most months of the year. On cold days air descends, and it is important that the hide/stand is not located where the air is moving in the direction of the water/salt lick.

Hides must be airtight with no peepholes or multiple shooting ports on all sides; - there will be a draught and your hunt will be over before it starts. Keep the door small and the shooting port in the door.

I prefer two hides/stands at a hunting spot; it allows the hunter to shift from one to the other according to the wind.

Pit blinds are very successful, but place it on the downwind or crosswind side from the salt/water, and make sure that game paths leading into these areas are not coming from behind. Pit blinds enable a hunter to place strings of zebra dung outside the shooting port on the ground, light it, and have it smoulder all day to cover human scent. No matter how well

we seal hides or use scent-lock suits, our breath blowing out of the shooting port is a dead giveaway.

The most important thing for hunting kudu, or any other animal, is to shower and put on clean clothes washed in a scentless soap each time you go to a hide or stand. A human being smells 'bad,' and if you are a smoker you will have a disadvantage.

Scents

Where vehicles, especially diesel-fuelled vehicles are used on properties, hang your clothes in the fumes of a running vehicle before you go hunting. Animals are familiar with that smell.

Where animals are used to the scent of wood-smoke clinging to the workers' clothes, sit on the smoke side of the fire.

Wet horse dung works like a charm. Smearing the sides of the shooting port and parts of the hide will cover some of your human scent. Stepping in the dung before going to the hides or tree stands is also a good idea.

To conclude

- Be patient, still and quiet. Try not to move at all; don't take food or anything that can cause you to move or make noises.
- Be ready. A kudu can move into shooting range in the blink of an eye. Bulls will wait a long time to come in after the females and younger bulls; sometimes they will not come in at all.
- Remember: There are birds, small mammals and reptiles around you. Be careful not to disturb them. Guinea-fowl and grey louries are very alert; monkeys and mongooses will spot you. One old kudu bull I hunted 'lived' with a troop of vervet monkeys, making it impossible to get a shot at him.
- If you spot a kudu, try not to look directly at him. I firmly believe they can feel being looked at.
- A big, angry-looking kudu bull can be very intimidating. Prepare for this. Focus on the spot where you want your arrow to hit. Give the kudu - and yourself - time to settle down. Wait before drawing that bow.
- Wait for a perfect shot angle, like a perfect broadside; I have seen angled shots miss vitals. Broadside, you have a bigger target; an angled shot can hit too far back or too far forward. Don't worry: If the bull doesn't present a shot opportunity and isn't spooked, he will be back to drink the same time the following day.

- Make your life as a bow hunter easier: Get a Jack Russell terrier. Most of my big bulls were killed at last light. Without my Jack Russell some would have not been found or would have been destroyed by jackal during the night.