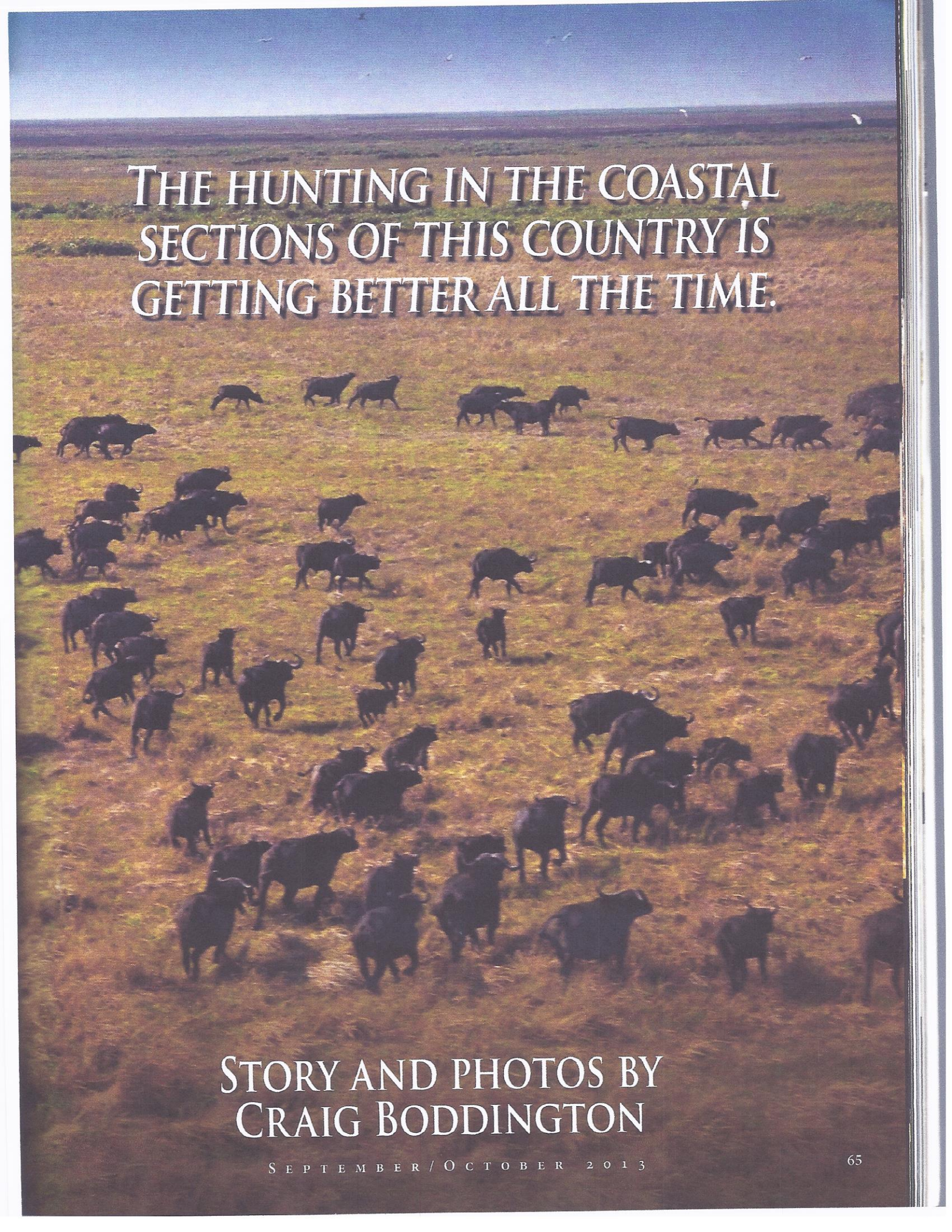
A wide-angle photograph of a savanna landscape. In the foreground and middle ground, a large herd of dark-colored nyala is running across a dry, yellowish-brown plain. The animals are in various stages of motion, some galloping and others trotting. The background shows a flat horizon under a clear, bright blue sky. The overall scene is dynamic and captures a moment of natural behavior in a wild environment.

TEN DAYS IN MOZAMBIQUE

I admit I had mixed feelings when I walked up to Mel Zeman's nyala. It was the first morning of our safari. We'd all checked our rifles and then gone in separate directions to hunt, but I doubt we were an hour out of camp when professional hunter Craigh Hamman radioed that Mel had taken a beautiful nyala. We weren't too far away, so we turned around to get some pictures. Mel's nyala was awesome, with horns just over 30 inches with the classic lyre in-and-out shape.

They'd seen him cross, had stopped and stalked him, and shot him in the cover fair and square. I was happy for Mel. I didn't know him yet, but he seemed a really good guy. On the other hand, this was my fourth try in Mozambique to get a nyala like that—and this was the first day of Mel's first safari. Geez! And the nyala was my primary reason—er, excuse—for being there.

I needn't have worried. We were in the latter third of October, when it gets hot in coastal Mozambique and the surface water starts to dry. This is always a good time for nyala—but this week we caught the dark of the moon and the nyala were on parade. On the third day I saw thirty-five bulls of all sizes.

A large herd of buffalo is running across a vast, open plain. The buffalo are dark in color and are scattered across the field, some running towards the camera and others away. The ground is a mix of brown and green grass. In the background, there is a flat horizon line under a clear blue sky with a few birds flying.

THE HUNTING IN THE COASTAL
SECTIONS OF THIS COUNTRY IS
GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
CRAIG BODDINGTON

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2013

The one I shot crossed a track as we were heading toward a pan. We took a hard look at him, and I initially passed. He didn't have the classic in-and-out configuration; his horns were more open—but he was a good nyala. We parked the truck so we could walk to the pan, and soon saw him again, walking to the pan in front of us. Now he looked bigger! I shot him, and I wasn't disappointed. There was no way I could get 30 inches out of his horns, but he was very close.

The Plan

In the last few years, coastal Mozambique has emerged as one of my favorite spots in Africa. This is surprising. I first hunted in Mozambique in the late 1980s, just as the long civil war was ending. I took my first decent elephant, but there was little else left alive, and my prediction was that the game was so far gone that it could never recover. Fortunately, I was dead wrong.

I returned to Mozambique, north of the Zambezi, in 2006. The hunting was good. On the way out I stopped south of the river to hunt suni and red duiker for a couple of days, and it looked great. I've been back every year since. There's nothing there I don't have, but the buffalo hunting is awesome and the variety of plains game is superb. The only continuing excuse I could come up with is that a big nyala continued to elude me. Oh, it wasn't for lack of opportunity. In Coutada 10 in 2008 I messed up on a monster. In 2009, hunting with Mark Haldane, I passed

a couple of good ones and shot an OK one. In 2011, same area, I never saw a big one, but Donna took a nice bull. What I loved most: Every year I saw the coastal Coutadas get better! More buffalo, more sable, more common game, more everything. And this is wild Africa, not a manicured game ranch. Somebody is doing something right.

Haldane's outfit is Zambeze Delta Safaris, a great outfit with great areas, Coutadas 11 and 12. In October 2012, he asked me if I would join Kelly McMillan of McMillan Arms and a group he was putting together. Well, why not? I was still looking for a big nyala, right?

As the hunt neared I had concerns about what I'd gotten myself into. I'm a bit of a loner, and this was a fairly large group. J.C. Bell, Mel Zeman, and Sean and Cathy Murtaugh were on their first safaris. Bruce Dunn was a veteran, and Kelly McMillan had hunted in South Africa a couple of times. Booking agent Gordie White would also join us. Kelly and I grew up together in the industry, but while I'd known his dad, Gale McMillan, I didn't know him very well. So it was a good chance to spend time with Kelly's rifles and their new line of McMillan ammo.

Turns out it was a compatible crew, nice people, and well-managed by Haldane's team. Between Coutada 11 and adjacent 12 we had some 2.5 million acres to spread out in, and the hunting was so good that almost every day great animals found their way into the skinning shed. A huge part of the fun was sharing that life-changing first safari with so many good folks! Needless to say, the whole



Kelly McMillan's first buffalo, a beautiful bull taken with one of his McMillan rifles in .404 Jeffery, firing 430-grain North Fork semi-spitzers.

camp was equipped with McMillan rifles and ammo. I was using a .300 Winchester Magnum and a .404 Jeffery; Kelly was well-equipped with a 7mm Remington Magnum, a .338 Winchester Magnum, and another .404. The rest of the group had a mix of 7mms, .300s, .416 Remington Magnums, and .375s. All the shooters and all the rifles got good workouts.

Bad Week to be a Buffalo

When the civil war ended in Mozambique, barely a thousand buffalo remained in the Marromeu Reserve. In 2012 the World Wildlife Fund's survey showed 18,000 buffalo on the floodplains, one of the greatest concentrations in modern Africa. However, a change I've noticed is that, although the big herds are out on the floodplains, buffalo are increasing in the surrounding forests. The area thus offers two very different buffalo hunts: In the forest, buffalo are hunted by tracking. The floodplains are different. Accessed by swamp vehicles, buffalo are glassed in the sawgrass and papyrus—you're actually glassing for the white egrets that circle and dive above the herds. Both are great hunts, so you can take your pick, or let the buffalo choose for you.

Our group had very good luck in the forest. Bruce Dunn, hunting with Rye Pletts, took a fine buffalo in the forest early in the hunt—and toward the end took another one. C.J. Bell, hunting with Poen Van Zyl, took a fine sable on the first day,

and a buffalo with huge bosses in the forest a couple of days later. Depending on how you look at it, he was either lucky or unlucky; his first buffalo hunt ended in a full-on charge, which he stopped. Two days later he took an awesome waterbuck and declared his safari complete (more or less)!

Sean and Cathy Murtaugh, hunting with Ben Rautenbach, had good luck and bad. Amazingly, they got into buffalo in the forest every day for five days, but couldn't find a decent bull in the herds. On the sixth day they loaded up in the swamp vehicles and headed for the floodplains. By this time I suspect they were a little frustrated, but in this area they had no worries. Cathy and Sean each shot good, mature buffalo that day. Long before the buffalo were in the salt, Sean came back to camp with another 30-inch nyala, and during the course of the hunt he took a fine bushbuck, a good suni, and an especially huge reedbuck.

Me, well, I've tracked buffalo all over Africa, but the swamp hunting is different and I like it. For years Haldane has been using the excellent Argo tracked vehicles to access the swamp, but this year he had new toys, two big ex-Swedish army machines designed for tundra, snow, and swamp. It was probably the fourth day when Kelly, Gordie, and I headed to the swamp in one of these monsters. Mel Zeman and Craig Hamman loaded up in the other; we headed out to the swamp together, then split off and went different directions.

The center of the floodplains is the Marromeu Reserve, where hunting is not allowed. Coutadas 10, 11, and



In Coutadas 10 and 11 sable bulls are seen every day, so there's no reason to be in a hurry. It was late in the hunt when Kelly McMillan took his, a very good bull for the area.

14 about the Reserve on, respectively, the southwest, west, and northwest, each having a big chunk of floodplain as well as adjacent *miombo* forest. Out on the floodplains, the buffalo run in big herds, usually several hundred. Although bachelor groups are seen in the forests and the palm islands on the edges, I have never seen a group of “dagga bulls” on the floodplains; out there the bulls seem to stay in the herds. So you hunt the herds, which is a lot of fun. They circulate around, in, and out of the Reserve, and could be anywhere out there. So you cover ground, looking for

fresh sign and glassing for white birds or a low black line on the horizon.

On this day the first herd we found was quite far out, but it was a big group, probably three hundred strong. We dismounted and got the wind right, using sawgrass and papyrus to make an approach. We almost got too close—we were focused on the herd when a cow jumped up in the sawgrass just a few feet from us! She huffed off in the opposite direction, so we pushed on and caught the herd on a narrow plain surrounded by sawgrass. There are few lions in this area, and the buffalo are

calm. They gave us time, and while you’ll never see all the bulls in a herd this size, there were several good bulls in the shifting mass.

Mark got Kelly on the sticks and picked out a nice bull with good bosses and excellent shape, distance maybe eighty yards. They shifted a bit more, and then the bull was clear, facing us on the edge of the herd. I saw the puff as the 430-grain North Fork struck the broad chest, and then the bull whirled and was back in the mass, no chance for a second shot. The herd moved off maybe forty yards, then turned back to us in an instant replay.

Now I was on the sticks. We waited a few moments, hoping to see Kelly’s bull—and hoping it was down—but then another very nice bull pushed to the edge and I took the quartering-to shot on the point of the shoulder. It looked good, but that one, too, was instantly lost to view. So we waited several minutes, allowing the herd to move off, and hoping they would leave two bulls down in their wake. While we waited, a bull detached from the herd and walked slowly to the sawgrass on the right. We knew he was probably one of the two stricken bulls, but we only had a side angle on the horns and, in the harsh midday light, we couldn’t see blood. So we waited, and when the herd moved off only one still form lay in the short grass.

This was Kelly’s bull, center-punched with the .404, down and dead. The herd had moved off to the left, so the bull in the—gulp—tall sawgrass to the right was probably mine. We had lost sight of him at the edge, but we all thought he had gone deeper into the grass. So we walked to the edge, fanning out as we approached. My focus was twenty or thirty yards into the grass. I was looking for a telltale speck of black when an entire buffalo levitated into view ten feet in front of us. Mark and I fired almost together and the bull was down—but I’m sure you’ll forgive me for firing yet another shot as soon as I could work the bolt!

Both bulls were good Mozambique buffalo, and now we had some work to do. It was midafternoon before we headed out of the swamp; partway out



A good swamp buffalo, taken with a McMillan rifle in .404 Jeffery firing McMillan’s 430-grain load.



Mark Haldane, Etienne Hoeksma, and Boddington with a gorgeous nyala, the kind of nyala Boddington had been waiting for.

Mel and Craig joined us, also with a very good buffalo.

Zebra, Sable, and More Nyala

I pride myself on knowing the myriad races and subspecies of African animals, and I can generally quote them chapter and verse, but the various races of common zebra—Grant, Burchell, Chapman—are confusing. There's also the Selous zebra, named

in honor of Frederick Courteney Selous. For years I'd thought that the Selous zebra was the zebra of Tanzania's Selous Reserve. Uh, no. The Selous zebra is a small-bodied zebra found in coastal Mozambique and on up to Malawi. Stripes are distinctive: pure black and white, no shadow stripes, with horizontal stripes all the way down the leg. Coastal Mozambique is the only place this zebra is currently hunted. In numbers it is probably the rarest plains species in the area, but Coutada 11's

herd has built up to about three hundred, now with a small quota.

Kelly and I had both spoken for zebras, so we headed out together to look for them. These zebras hang out in herds on vast, grassy plains on the edge of the swamp. Mark had cautioned us that the shots would be long—and he sure got that right! We found a herd far out on the grass, and we approached on foot, not trying to sneak (what's the point?), but walking slowly at an oblique angle. We started at a half mile, with the zebra spooking and moving several times—but finally a group stood at 350 yards and Mark picked out a stallion. Kelly made a really pretty shot, placing a .338 Berger VLD bullet right behind the shoulder.

Now it was my turn, but this was a hard act to follow. A few minutes later another stallion stood at 400 yards, one of the longer shots I've ever needed to make in Africa. I got a good rest on a termite mound and held just below the backline and a bit into the wind. I guessed right; the 185-grain Berger in McMillan's load centered the on-shoulder, exited the off-shoulder, and the stallion made a short circle and fell over. Up close they were indeed gorgeous zebras, each with a unique white spot on the center of the back where, theoretically, the striping starts.

Kelly's primary plains-game goal was a sable, and this is a great area to look for this beautiful antelope. They don't get huge there, but between Coutada 11 and 12 Haldane figures he has two and a half thousand sable. You see them every day in beautiful herds, and finding a good one is just a matter of time. It was late in the hunt and we'd looked over a lot of sable when the right one came along. He was in palm forest on the edge of the floodplain, alone; it was a simple stalk and a good shot—and a gorgeous sable.

Me, well, I kept looking for nyala. Haldane's quota is large, but early in the season, when the cover is thick and there's lots of water, they're hard to find—so that's one quota that is rarely filled. So I kept looking, and saw a lot more nyala. The challenge was timing. In Africa I hate to sit all day—there's just too much to see—so we tried key



If Boddington looks a little bit green with envy over Mel Zeman's nyala, he was! This is a gorgeous bull, taken in the first hour of Zeman's first day in Africa.



Kelly McMillan and Mark Haldane with a spectacular warthog. This is just one of several awesome warthogs taken by the group. Boddington had never seen so many big warthogs taken in such a short period.

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pans early, late, and at midday. We always saw nyala, but we were having trouble catching the right one at the right time.

There was one big pan where I was consistently seeing nyala, and toward the end of the hunt I saw a group of nine bulls there with one monster. I'm pretty sure he was bigger than the one I'd taken—but he had similar horns with an open shape. So I passed. The next day Haldane and I stalked the same pan at midday, catching a different group of bulls leaving as we approached. We made a quick circle, Mark put up the sticks, and said, "Shoot the third one." After all this time he knew better than I what we were looking for, so I shot the third bull in line without even looking at the horns. Yes, at long last, this was the Mozambique nyala I'd been looking for!

Like the Old Days

Everyone in the group had different goals, and of course everybody was watching the budget. So there were many animals seen but not taken. I saw more eland and hartebeest than I've ever seen in these areas, including several amazing eland bulls. Herds of sable were seen every day, and near the floodplains, waterbuck, reedbuck, oribi, and more were plentiful. Part of it is we hit a good time but I suspect another part is that, after many years of careful management, these areas are blossoming.

In ten hunting days, our group took eight mature buffalo bulls, three good sable, four big nyala, two zebras, and one crocodile, plus a scattering of waterbuck, reedbuck, bushbuck, duiker, suni, oribi, bushpigs, and an incredible array of really big warthogs—more big warthogs than I have ever seen in one camp. Amazingly, every hunter took the game he or she intended to take (with some extras), good trophies all. I was reminded of good areas in Zambia in the mid-1980s, and good areas in Tanzania twenty years ago. It's so rare to see the clock turned back in Africa that I'll have to find a good excuse to go back. I just don't know yet what it will be.