

Trackers



the forgotten other half



Johnny, a Namibian-registered hunting guide, assisted Cecil Leonard (right) in hunting this magnificent eland.

Johnny aka "Zeiss Eyes"

Cecil Leonard

I had hunted with Johnny the year before, thinking he was one heck of a tracker. His ability to spot the game long before I did – if I ever did – convinced me that he deserved the nickname "Zeiss Eyes". His abilities in the bush simply astounded me.

Joof Lamprecht, the owner of Hunters Namibia Safaris, was my PH on that first safari and my hunt with him was slow, easy and very successful.

The following year upon arrival, Joof asked if it would be OK if his tracker, Johnny, took the lead on our hunts. Of course Joof would also accompany us. Johnny – his full names are Johannes Hogobeb – has been Joof's loyal tracker for 26 years and his confidence in him is rock-solid. He informed me that Johnny had also been a licensed PH for several years. I easily agreed as I found Johnny to be quite capable and very much a gentleman.

I regret not knowing more personal information about Johnny, but what I do know is that he is very kind, quiet and always looking out for the client's wellbeing and success. I soon learned one other quality he possesses – he is a genuine predator when on the hunt! Being short and fat, I had trouble at first keeping up with him, but after the first day he slowed down enough to allow for my physical shortcomings.

The adrenaline that was burned up over the next week or so was unbelievable. If the food had not been so incredible, I would have lost 30 pounds, but alas, I left heavier than I arrived! Chasing Johnny around the bushveld after those magnificent

creatures was as we say "a real kick in the butt". Crawling and squat-walking are so different from any hunting I've ever done, but I'd never hunted with a predator before.

One of our stalks on zebra found us pinned down by impala and blue wildebeest. Those pesky impala seemed to be running interference for the zebra as no matter what manoeuvre we made they were always between us and our quarry. After an hour of playing cat and mouse the stallion made a mistake and came within 50 yards of us. Being the wary creatures that they are, however, he spotted my movement onto the sticks. Game over – zebras won again!

All was not lost on this stalk as a grand eland bull forgot to run when every other creature in the area had left for new territory. A 300gr triple shock from my .375 reverberated across the wilderness. This magnifi-

cent specimen will look great in my manshack.

Later Johnny put us in real close to a herd of Hartmann's mountain zebras, but no stallion was with them. Johnny informed me there was a very old and barren mare in there and since her productive years were over, asked if I was willing to take her instead. Within minutes we were taking photos of this great old lady – she will make a beautiful rug for our home.

A few days later I experienced the greatest hunt of my life. Johnny was in top form taking us from one prick-you-and-stick-you bush to another after a herd of Burchell's zebras. The intensity of this stalk was surreal for me; time was lost.

As Johnny would peep around the bush to check what the herd was doing, I wanted to do the same, but dared not in fear of blowing the stalk that he had worked so hard on for

me. So, sneaking a peek through the bush we were behind was what I was happy to settle for. I have no clue how long this took, but I wish I could do it again; the adrenaline rush was profound. This is my drug of choice!

Then, as the sun was fading the sticks went up. The stallion was away from the herd facing left; no chance of shooting the wrong one.

After Joof showed up with the Land Cruiser it was time for photos and celebration. I informed Joof that I wanted to give Johnny my treasured Zeiss 10x40 Classic binos. That moment was captured with the press of a button and is one of my favourite photos from that safari.

It may not sound like much to you, but it makes me proud that those treasured binos will always be where they belong – Africa!

Johnny (right) with the Zeiss binos given to him by the author, US client Cecil Leonard (left), after a successful zebra hunt. The hunt took place on the vast camel-thorn Kalahari lands of Joof and Marina Lamprecht of Hunters Namibia Safaris in eastern Namibia.





Johnny with client Don Burkhart (right) and impala trophy

Johnny

from tracker to hunting professional

Marina Lamprecht
Hunters Namibia
Safaris

Johnny, aka Johnny, arrived here at our safari camp in January 1991, a somewhat restless 22-year-old. As Joof and I had just returned from our annual safari circuit marketing pilgrimage to the USA, we were a little jet-lagged, but could not help noticing

that there was a spring in his step, a spark in his eyes and an intelligent curiosity in his communications, which led us both to believe that he had great potential. Johnny had served in the South African Defence Force before Namibia's independence, and then gone on to do an apprenticeship in welding and basic mechanics – all very useful skills out here in the bush. He was dating our housekeeper of many years at the time, so we offered him a position as trainee tracker at Hunters Namibia Safaris.

Little did we know, though, that the local trade union would soon transform this promising young man into a very challenging employee. Johnny started to question *everything* – the early start to the days, the long hours as well as 7-day working weeks, which are essential in the safari business, all became an “issue”. During the hunt, Johnny would not spot *anything* before 08:00, and then his spotting skills would again evaporate at around 17:00. Our relationship became very strained, and Johnny's

future with us certainly did not look bright – not a good situation!

Fate then intervened and Johnny came in early one morning to ask for a few days off to try and trace his herd of goats, which had “disappeared” the previous evening. He tracked them right to the yard of the local trade union official . . . Johnny saw the light, dropped his challenging ways, and became a model employee. A few weeks later a representative of the union came to speak to our employees, noticed the great working conditions, and asked us for a job! Needless to say, we sent him on his merry way . . . Over the next few months Johnny proved to be a quick and eager learner, and soon became Joof's main tracker and hunting assistant.

Johnny was one of the people in our local hunting industry who inspired me to work on the hunting courses for Previously Disadvantaged Namibians with NAPHA (Namibia Professional Hunting Association). No matter how one might want to argue the situation away, the reality

is that the difficulty in finding quality schooling, which certain sectors of our population had faced during the previous regime, had led to generations of talented people not being able to achieve their full potential through education. Johnny attended Volker Grellmann's first PDN course, which culminated in the verbal examination, as we had negotiated with our Ministry of Environment and Tourism. Johnny achieved excellent results, and holds the position as one of the Eagle Rock's top PDN students to date.

Johnny is an exceptional hunting professional as he is not only intuitive in the bush, but has excellent eyesight, quick wit and great tracking skills. He and Joof have developed an excellent working relationship, interpreting each other's body language as well as the urgency reflected in the tone of one another's voices when on the hunt. Joof describes Johnny as the “perfect employee and my right-hand man” which, coming from Joof, who is the ultimate perfectionist and strict

taskmaster, is high praise indeed! Joof has often gone on to say that when Johnny stops hunting at his side he, too, will hang up his hunting hat.

Apart from our working relationship, I do so respect the fact that Johnny is a very caring and an involved father, who makes sure that his children have access to the best possible education. He often discusses their progress, as well as the inevitable challenges, which they face as teenagers, with me. There is no doubt that with his guidance they will all go on to become successful adults.

Johannes Hogobeb – from tracker to hunting professional – it has been an honour to have experienced this talented and dedicated Namibian's progress and success. 🐾

