



The author's first nyala had a fine winter mane and neck ruff. It fell to one shot from a Weatherby left-hand Mark V in .257 Weatherby Magnum.



The second nyala was an ancient gentleman with tall, ivory-tipped horns. His badly worn teeth would not have carried him through another year.

# Nyala

## Times Two

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There I was – caught like a burglar in a spotlight. The nyala ewe stared at me with unblinking eyes. One foot forward in a half-stride, my walking staff set, my rifle slung forward European-style, I concentrated on remaining still as a statue before her unwavering gaze.

Danie Lourens, my PH, and our trackers were crouched, shielded behind some bushes on the sloping, rocky verge that descended sharply to a narrow stream below. On the equally steep opposite slope, a herd of at least 20 nyalas worked in and out of sight in the thick undergrowth – except for the ewe that was staring me down.

Several young bulls mingled with the ewes as they grazed. We hadn't yet seen any trophy-sized bulls, but a herd this size almost certainly had a mature breeder bull among them.

Time trickled slowly by, and the ewe's eyes remained riveted on me. Finally, with a quick toss of her head and a twitch of her tail, she turned away and wandered off behind a large bush. I took the opportunity to find concealment next to Danie, while we watched the nyalas.

The herd continued to graze, and one by one, more animals gradually came into view.

"There!" Danie said. "That's a good one." I followed his pointing finger and saw a fine nyala bull with full neck ruff and mane working downslope through the brush. As the bull paused, concealed beneath the crown of a tree, Danie spread the shooting sticks, and I set my .257 Weatherby into the crotch. The range would be close – perhaps 60 yards.

The Trijicon scope revealed glimpses of the bull and his massive, ivory-tipped horns through the tree's leafy branches, but no clear shot. We would need to wait until he stepped into the open. At least two young bulls were wandering about close by. We would get glimpses, a flash of horns, and after a longer look, see only an immature set of horns. Which one was the big one?

Minutes passed while the nyala bulls grazed and browsed behind the screening brush, and I lost track of what I thought was the big bull as he walked a few steps and disappeared from view entirely. I waited impatiently for him to step out. Perhaps ten minutes passed, then I felt a tug at my sleeve.

"There," Danie said, pointing up to the left. "That's him coming out now."

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I was mildly surprised to see the bull appear well away from where I had last seen him, but there he was. I peered through the scope, settled the bright red triangle on the bull's shoulder, and pressed the trigger. I felt the slap of recoil on my shoulder, and almost instantly, the bullet slammed into the animal's chest with a loud *Thwack*.

Shaking brush and pounding hooves marked the flight of the panicked herd as the nyalas departed in all directions. My bull struggled, sliding down the embankment, then lay still. The 115-grain Barnes Triple-Shock from a Cor-Bon factory load had done its work.

I was hunting near the town of Somerset East in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa about three hours north of Port Elizabeth. Our hunting area was in the Midland Highlands of the Eastern Cape, a malaria-free region of mountainous and rocky terrain with the highest peak about 6,000 feet above sea level.

Todd Rathner of The T. Jeffrey Safari Company arranged this hunt, following a conversation we had in Tucson, Arizona. His company books hunts with safari operators in both South Africa and Namibia. Todd personally inspects all operations that he represents, so I knew this would be a first-class experience.

Todd booked my hunt with Tollie and Karen Jordaan, who offer hunts for a wide variety of plains game on ranches owned by Tollie's family for five generations. Todd had high praise for Tollie's operation, and as I found out he was spot on.

Tollie's luxurious lodge is located at the ranch headquarters and guest accommodations include several nicely appointed bungalows with a kitchen, sitting area and several bedrooms with adjoining baths.

Additional accommodations are available at Buffelsfontein farm, which means Buffalo Springs in Afrikaans. Buffelsfontein lodge has five bedrooms and is decorated with taxidermy and antiques. It also has its own swimming pool.

The area's natural vegetation is well suited for a variety of plains game, and features mountains, deep canyons, small rivers and no game fencing. The land abounds with kudus, impalas, springboks, blesboks, zebras, bushbucks, duikers, steen-

boks, and other plains game species.

Most of all, Tollie's is an nyala paradise as I had discovered.

It was no easy task getting my nyala up the steep brushy slope to level ground where our four-wheel-drive "bakkie" awaited, but it was accomplished, and we delivered the animal to Tollie's taxidermy studio. In addition to Tollie's fine hunts, he offers world-class taxidermy as well as packing, crating and all necessary documentation to export trophies from South Africa and import them into the U.S. or other destinations.

A quick measurement of my nyala showed it was a fine, symmetrical trophy, but we'd erred on our estimate of horn length. Because of the steep angle of the slope where we'd found the nyala herd, we had almost a bird's eye view of the several bulls with the herd, instead of seeing them in a horizontal plane. Viewing the horns from this unusual aspect, had led to our error in estimating their length. Nevertheless, this bull was magnificent, and I would be proud to have him on my wall.

After we dropped off my trophy, we stopped at Buffelsfontein for a leisurely lunch and pit stop. While we were there, Tollie arrived with something on his mind.

"Stan, I've seen the nyala you took this morning," he told me. "And I want you to have a better one."

My ears perked up immediately. The opportunity to take one trophy nyala is something that comes to only a few hunters. I had never expected the chance to take two of these beautiful animals. Tollie then turned to Danie and told him he had seen a very old bull nyala several times in the late afternoon on a bottomland alfalfa field and suggested we try for him.

Late that afternoon Danie and I crept down a trail through lengthening shadows toward the alfalfa field Tollie had described. Slipping past an old corral, we stepped carefully around dry twigs and leaves until we reached the verge of the field. Danie paused and raised his binocular. After a moment he lowered them again and looked at me, shaking his head. With hand gestures, he directed me to a spot where I could sit and watch for the old bull to emerge from the surrounding undergrowth to feed on the tender alfalfa.

We watched the field for the rest of the afternoon, but the bull never showed. Trudging back to the bakkie, Danie suggested we try another location in the morning, and if we didn't

find a good bull we'd try this field again in the late afternoon. I agreed. We had seen lots of nyalas, and I knew there were some excellent trophy bulls. Sooner or later we'd find the right one.

Up early the next morning, we wolfed down a continental breakfast that Karen's kitchen staff had laid out for us, then we mounted up on the bakkie. Starting on a hopeful note, we tried several remote fields where nyalas might feed. Each time we left the bakkie where we could approach a field from downwind, then we sneaked through stands of thorny brush until we could see into the field.

Several times we encountered one or two nyalas or occasionally a kudu. After checking for horns, we would slip past them and move on. Once we came within a few yards of a young nyala bull that ambled slowly by before disappearing into the brush.

Nyalas were everywhere, but despite our careful stalks, no big bull presented itself. We changed our venue to a wooded bottomland along a small stream. Once again, we saw numerous nyalas, including one good-sized bull that spotted us and quickly ghosted away.

By early afternoon, we still hadn't fired a shot, so we took a lunch break. After a short powwow with Danie, we agreed that the alfalfa field from the afternoon before was our best bet. Danie pointed out that the old bull probably needed the tender alfalfa badly. His worn teeth wouldn't be able to handle rougher, natural forage so he almost certainly would show up at the alfalfa field this afternoon.

So it was that late afternoon found us set up again in the same spot where we'd watched the alfalfa field the day before. Sometimes a hunter's plans work out perfectly and a trophy animal shows up exactly where he is supposed to, exactly when he is supposed to.

When this happens some hunters say Diana smiled. In this case it was Danie, not Diana who smiled as an aged bull nyala with tall, ivory-tipped horns minced out of the underbrush into the far edge of the alfalfa field and stood facing us.

Danie raised the laser rangefinder as I laid the Weatherby across the shooting sticks and found the old bull in the riflescope. "It's 230 yards," he whispered. "Wait till he turns broadside."

After a moment, the bull turned, and I placed the red triangle of the Trijicon "candlestick" reticle on his shoulder where it wobbled and



**The author's second nyala had badly worn teeth that couldn't handle rough, natural forage. That forced him to depend on the tender alfalfa in the field where we found him.**

bobbed crazily.

I glanced toward Danie. "Support my elbow," I whispered.

Danie stepped alongside me and braced my elbow, and instantly the glowing triangle settled down. I pressed the trigger, and the rifle bucked against my shoulder.

"Good shot," Danie shouted. "Hit him again."

I slapped the bolt back and forward, chambering a fresh round. I found the bull again as he walked a few steps, then stopped, still on his feet.

At my second shot the bull collapsed and didn't move again.

Danie slapped my shoulder and offered his hand. "Good shooting," he said. "He's finished."

When we reached the fallen bull, Danie kneeled, opened the old bull's mouth and showed me the teeth worn down to mere stubs almost even with his gums. Soon, the bull would have been unable to graze even tender alfalfa shoots. Then his gaunt flanks would have shrunk even more, and he would have starved slowly. This was a much more merciful end for a magnificent creature.

As I looked at the bull's very long horns, I was glad we had taken him. In due course, he would occupy a place of honor on my wall, and each time I see him I will remember a memorable hunt and African adventure with a fine professional hunter who has become a valued friend. 🐘