

NO LONGER SPOTLESS

by *Steve Folkman*, AHA director



Despite unaccommodating weather and determined poachers, my ultimate hunting experience reached its pinnacle on Day 14. I was able to take a big, beautiful leopard.



Standing in Tanzania, over Jill's left shoulder is Rwanda and to her right is Uganda. A valley in the middle divides the two.

As I sat in the grass leopard blind, I couldn't help but roll through my mind the events that had passed during the last 14 days. I was starting to wonder if I was going to get an opportunity at a leopard, any leopard, let alone a big one. I kept thinking about what Raoul told me when we booked the safari. "If you hunt hard and 'Lady Luck' is with you, you may get a leopard to hit bait, and if you do, it will be a big cat."

We had baits hanging, 13 of them over a 100 square kilometer (sq. km) tract. Leopards had hit a couple, but so had poachers taking the wild game as food for survival.

While the weather was typical Africa — 90s during the day and 70s at night — it rained every afternoon in this beautifully green vegetative corner of Tanzania, causing the leopards to sit tight like barn cats in a storm.

The "boys" (safari staff) had set bait the day before, and as luck would have it, a hungry tom hit that night. So we built a grass blind and held out for the afternoon. Waiting and watching the weaver birds in the tree above to pass the time, it looked to be another dry run. Tomorrow would be Day 15, and we would need to move on Day 16 to get my wife, Jill, and my mom, Lorna, to their photo safari.

As the light faded and the sun set, Webby, the professional hunter, told me, "Get your gun."

As I lifted it to unchamber the round he whispered, "In the hole." I had not sensed the approaching leopard. The bou bou birds cried in the distance and the weavers quickly left their perch above us. I slid the rifle through the oval hole in the grass blind and focused through the scope.

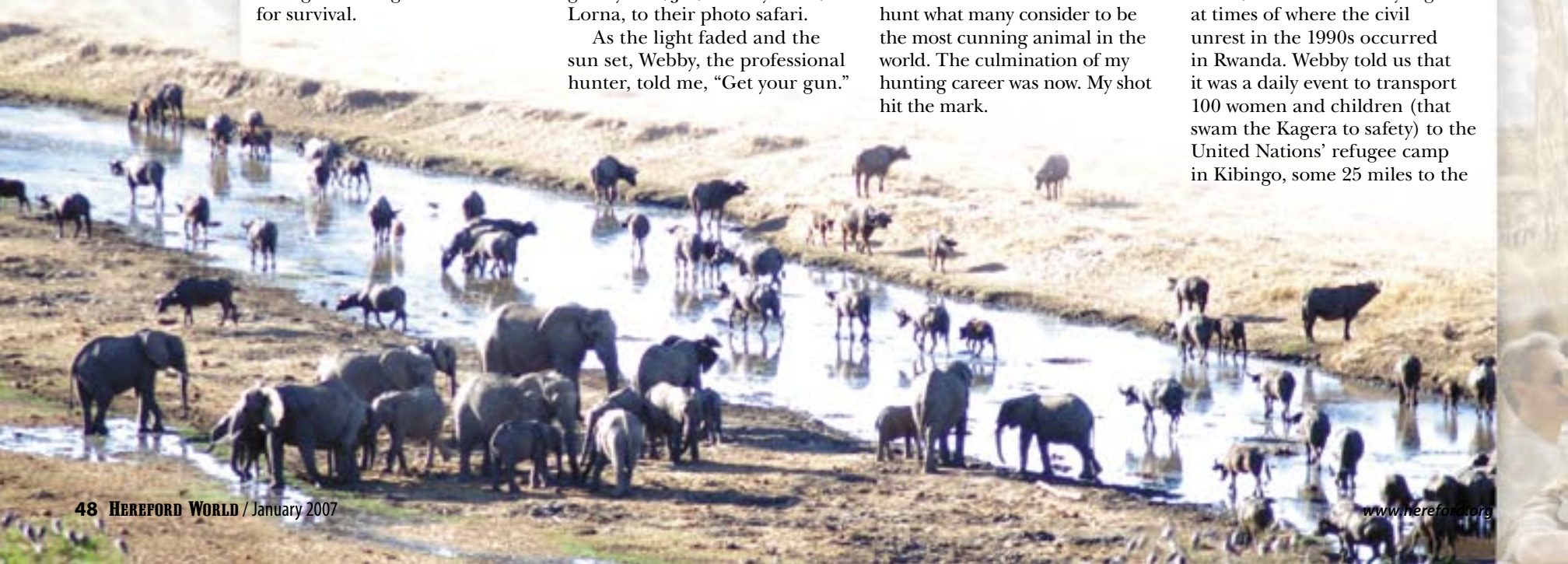
There he appeared near the bait in all his splendor — the leopard.

This was the moment I had long awaited. What started as a desire 10 years prior and grew after an unsuccessful but eventful first safari hunt seven years ago turned into an obsession to hunt what many consider to be the most cunning animal in the world. The culmination of my hunting career was now. My shot hit the mark.

This particular quest started in Chicago on Sept. 21. Mom, Jill and I flew to Amsterdam and then on to Kilimanjaro International Airport in Arusha, Tanzania, Africa.

After two long flights, more than 23 hours of travel and eight hours of time change, we were off to Ibanda on the morning of Sept. 23. This short 2½ hour airplane ride took us over the Serengeti and Lake Victoria, and then to the northwest corner of Tanzania. Ibanda is bordered by the Kagera River with Rwanda to the southwest and Uganda to the northwest.

Yes, we were within eyesight at times of where the civil unrest in the 1990s occurred in Rwanda. Webby told us that it was a daily event to transport 100 women and children (that swam the Kagera to safety) to the United Nations' refugee camp in Kibingo, some 25 miles to the





The Oldoinyo Lengai, or "Mountain of God" volcano, is one of the many Serengeti National Park attractions that wowed Jill and Mom on their photo safari.



One look at this guy and you know he's serious. The lion truly is "King" of the Serengeti.



We were fortunate to experience the Maasai culture in the Serengeti. The Maasai people are nomadic farmers, primarily of cattle and goats.

east. The tens of thousands who lost their lives in Rwanda in the 90s and during Idi Amin's Uganda regime in the 70s and 80s were in our minds as we enjoyed our Ibanda stay.

This tremendously game-rich area that was shared with us has left an unforgettable impression, from the herds of waterbuck, roan and cape buffalo to the baboons, reedbuck, topi and wary bushbuck. Then there were the sleek impala and the oribi that seemed to prance and bounce to the evasive leopards all in an unfenced, free-ranging environment.

Day 16 found us back at the 10,000-foot grass strip, the same one the Tanzanian Air Force took over in the early 90s. We had to catch a bush plane back to the east where Jill and Mom would start their five-day photo safari of the Tarangire, Lake Manyara and Serengeti national parks and the Ngorongoro Crater area. I continued on south to hunt other game.

Lake Manyara, where thousands of pink flamingos are found, is located centrally in the Great Rift Valley, which stretches over 10,000 km from Turkey to the mouth of the Zambezi River in

Mozambique. The rift is a fault in the Earth's crust that dominates much of Eastern Africa. This is where Jill and Mom were able to visually experience Africa, specifically Tanzania's wildlife in their natural environment.

The Maasai culture is realized throughout the Serengeti, where nomadic farmers graze their free-range livestock and the young men protect their herds from lions with spears. These wonderful people were recognized in their colorful clothing as in *National Geographic* magazine.

It was also here that the "Circle of Life" was sensed when lions fed on zebras and plains game, and elephants shielded their young ones.

From Ngorongoro Crater to the south where the last of the black rhinoceros roam to Oldoinyo Lengai (Maasai for Mountain of God) to the north; the Serengeti is where most Tanzanian visitors place their attention. It is the largest national park in Tanzania, some 15,000 sq. km in size and noted for its annual migration of zebra, wildebeest and plains game.

The Serengeti is west of Arusha where some of the richest



One of the most beautiful pictures captured on the photo safari was this of two zebras in the Serengeti. We were constantly in awe of the amazing wildlife of Tanzania.

farmland exists, producing coffee, wheat, bananas and tobacco. Arusha lies just west of one of the Seven Wonders of the World, Mount Kilimanjaro. It was here where we started and after three weeks of experiencing

Tanzania at its fullest, our safari came to a close. While I have fond memories of my hunt, it is the native culture that will forever remain with me. **HW**