

AFRICAN INDABA

Rolf Baldus' Book – “30 Years on the Tracks of the Big Five”

Reviewed by Gerhard Damm

Dr. Rolf D. Baldus, President of the CIC Tropical Game Commission, is no stranger to African Indaba readers ever since the first issue in January 2003. Baldus also authored many popular and scientific articles and papers on wildlife conservation and sustainable hunting in Africa. German speaking readers can now discover a new Baldus – the capable raconteur of hunting stories.

“Dreissig Jahre auf den Fährten der Big Five” (30 Years on the Tracks of the Big Five) is the title of his book, now hot of the press this very month of January.

Rolf Baldus reminisces on many a safari in different countries, mainly Eastern Africa, and he sure has some good hunting stories to tell. The fact that Baldus – with few exceptions – hunted on his own and without the assistance of a professional hunter sets this book apart from contemporary hunting literature. Local traditional hunters and game scouts were his tutors on his self-guided safaris. Although the young Baldus had passed the German “hunter’s exam” at the tender age of 17 after a one-year training course, he was soon to realize that this perfectionist German procedure hardly prepared him for African style hunting. That he survived his first safaris was more by good fortune and certainly not due to skill or prudence.

We know that hunting clients are temporary guests; they rarely see behind the scenes. Not so Baldus. From 1987 to 2005 – with a four-year interruption – he lived and worked in Tanzania’s game conservation. This gave him hands on experience as manager and game warden in the largest game reserve and some of the most pristine wilderness areas of Africa. These experiences are the main focus of Baldus’ book. Most of his stories don’t talk about selective hunting for record book trophies, but of the everyday chores in a game warden’s life: man-eating crocodiles, village meat hunts for buffalo, crop protection from marauding elephants, immobilizing elephant in the middle of the wilderness under a research program in connection with a wildlife corridor. In one his most gripping stories, Baldus recounts the hunt for Osama, the notorious man eating lion which had already killed about 34 people along the Rufiji River.

Readers will discover a totally new Baldus – not the serious scientist, not the passionate advocate of innovative approaches in wildlife conservation and community wildlife management – they will find a witty raconteur of hunting tales. This book reveals Baldus as a man with a good sense of humour combined with a profound knowledge of wildlife, people and hunting. This is a book not only for

hunters, and all hunters should consider buying it as a present for those friends who watch too many African animal documentaries on TV.

Those who don't speak German, I am afraid, will have to wait for the English version.

Dreissig Jahre auf den Fährten der Big Five by Rolf Baldus

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