INTRODUCTION

"...hunting is not simply casting blows right and left in order to kill animals or to catch them. The hunt is a series of technical operations, and for an activity to become technical it has to matter that it works in one particular way and not in another. Technique presupposes that success in reaching a certain goal is difficult and improbable; to compensate for its difficulty and improbability one must exert oneself to invent a special procedure of sufficient effectiveness." Meditations on Hunting (1972, p. 65) philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset.

These words of wisdom by y Gasset clearly explain why thirty years ago I set out to develop an effective system for hunting sambar. At that time the technique most commonly used to hunt these "ghosts of our eucalypt forests" was "walking-them-up." But if you study the sambar's evolution as prey of the world's most formidable land predator the tiger, leopard, wild dog and man, you quickly realise that "walking-them-up" is certain to result in a low success rate, for this method plays perfectly to the strengths of this deer.

Walking-them-up mostly results in the deer defeating the hunter - who after losing time and time again - becomes increasingly disillusioned and frustrated. I know only too well how disillusioned a hunter can become, for in the beginning I also "walked-them-up" and was beaten time and again. Occasionally I got lucky and managed to harvest one for every twelve full days of "spook and shoot."

After eight years of "bush walking with a rifle" I decided there had to be a better way, so in 1989 I began the research which slowly but surely became my Hunt Smart® system. When I first began I had no idea I would discover so much about these deer, let alone be able to develop an effective system for hunting them.

My job with Victoria Police restricted me to part time study which frustrated me so in October 1999 I resigned. I dived off the side of the ship and moved to Bairnsdale where I commenced full time study, initially by guiding hunters on free range hog and fallow, but mostly sambar. Whilst I have learnt an enormous amount during this quietly gratifying journey, there has never been one revealing "aha" moment when suddenly everything made sense. Rather, there have been countless well-spaced periods during which I searched for and found another piece of the jigsaw.

It took many observations of sambar doing precisely the same thing before I concluded it was a clear trend. I was resolute that each behaviour had to be substantiated by compelling evidence before I accepted it as the truth. To test each hypothesis, I frequently checked places where I believed sambar should not have been in the prevailing conditions.

Observing sambar over eighteen years at three separate locations, each with different habitat and weather, enabled me to see the underlying pattern in their behaviour. Slowly but surely each piece of the jigsaw came together until finally I understood why the deer were doing what they were doing at various times of the day and in diverse weather conditions.

My objective was not merely to understand their behaviour. I was equally determined to capture great photographs and high quality video which brings it to life. Fortunately during my journey, photographic equipment improved to levels never before imagined. One of the great strengths of my current workhorse - a Nikon 800 f5.6 and Nikon D500 DSLR - is that it has allowed me to study and photograph sambar from so far away, that despite their acute sense of smell and bionic like hearing, mostly they have been unaware

Errol, 3rd from right, in May 2017 returning from a morning in the bush with the Hunt Smart course participants. Note the high visibility of the hunters who are wearing blaze orange which enhances their safety. See the chapter "Vision", pp. 42 - 55, SOTS Vol. 2 for a comprehensive discussion as to how deer see, including a colour chart which shows that deer see blaze orange as a bronze-brown tone which does not attract their attention.

of me. This non-invasive technique has allowed me to observe individuals and small groups for many hours, often from first light until dark. This has enabled me to answer a long list of questions about their behaviour.

As a result, my Hunt Smart system provides a hunter with intimate knowledge of the quarry so he can employ low impact techniques. Doing so literally turns the tables on the deer. In contrast, a hunter who does not possess this knowledge does not know where to find them so he has no option but to walk continuously in the faint hope of spooking one and get a shot at a rapidly disappearing blur. Due to poor shot placement the deer escapes wounded and the hunter blames his inadequate calibre and buys a more powerful one.

Because our forests are vast and have an interminable number of gullies, spurs and ridges, not only must you walk continuously, but in order to cover as much ground as possible, you must do so at such a fast pace that the deer are aware, and have quietly slipped away. To make matters worse, you have deposited scent not just where you walked, but to wherever it blew, making the hunted all the more watchful.

I have identified the most vulnerable aspects of sambar behaviour and I show you when and how to exploit these "vulnerabilities", or "chinks in their armour". Each vulnerability is a vital part of my system which you should exploit at the right time.

When these vulnerabilities are combined with my overlays which are explained later, it is possible to narrow down where the deer are going to be to just 10 per cent of the total forest.

My system is based upon clear trends in sambar behaviour. Whilst 5% may appear to break the trend, your hunting will be more successful and enjoyable if you focus on the 95% chance. Feedback from hundreds of course participants, including the more than 60 Success Stories posted on our website has confirmed beyond doubt the effectiveness of my system which is all about focusing on the highest chance.

It provides the knowledge necessary to develop a plan for finding sambar that have no idea you are there, giving you time to range the distance, adopt a steady shooting position, then take the shot at precisely the right moment resulting in an instant one shot kill. Sambar Shikar does not get any better than that.

At the time of writing in July 2018 the number of sambar is at an all time high, and increasing rapidly, so never before has there been such an urgent need for an effective system for harvesting these Big Brown Deer. By explaining how their evolution has equipped them to easily elude predators - including man - and how it has determined everything they do and don't do, the first chapter sets the scene for this book.

June 10th 2017, 10.29am.

This photo highlights one of many vulnerabilities of stags which you can exploit - their constant desire for sex. During the 5$^{1}/_{2}$ or so months that stags are in hard antler they spend much time patrolling their large home range checking hinds for receptivity. So if you use low impact techniques to observe hinds with calves and focus your efforts on them, eventually a stag will walk up to one as the photo at left and others in this book show.

I began photographing this hind and calf at 7.15am - just after first light. They remained bedded except for three minutes when at 10.26 the hind moved and stood in cover ten metres in front of her calf, then returned to her bed. At 10.29am - the moment she lay down - this young stag emerged from cover and began licking her. He licked her all over for eight minutes, then moved 15m up the face to a large eucalypt and stood beside it. At 10.45 the hind was disturbed by my camera's shutter. She stood and was "out of there" in a blink with the calf and stag following. I continued to observe them for another thirty minutes during which time the stag shadowed her and smelled her genitalia but there was no attempt to mount. A hind will only allow a stag to mount when she is in peak oestrous. I estimated her calf to weigh about 30kg and to be about 8 weeks old, which is about the age when their mothers conceive.

SAMBAR

Understanding Their Evolution

If you want to understand sambar behavior then understand their evolution for it explains why they do this and don't do that. Why they fear this and not that. Why they are inquisitive of this and not that. Why you will find them here and not there. Everything they do and don't do is driven by their evolution. It's really that simple.

Moments before this powerful tigress emerged from a wall of dense cover, the jungle resonated with the alarms calls of langurs, sambar and chital. In fact three chital galloped from this very spot just moments before she emerged. Photo taken by the author March 2nd 2018, at Nagarhole National Park during 14 Incredible Days in the Indian Jungle.