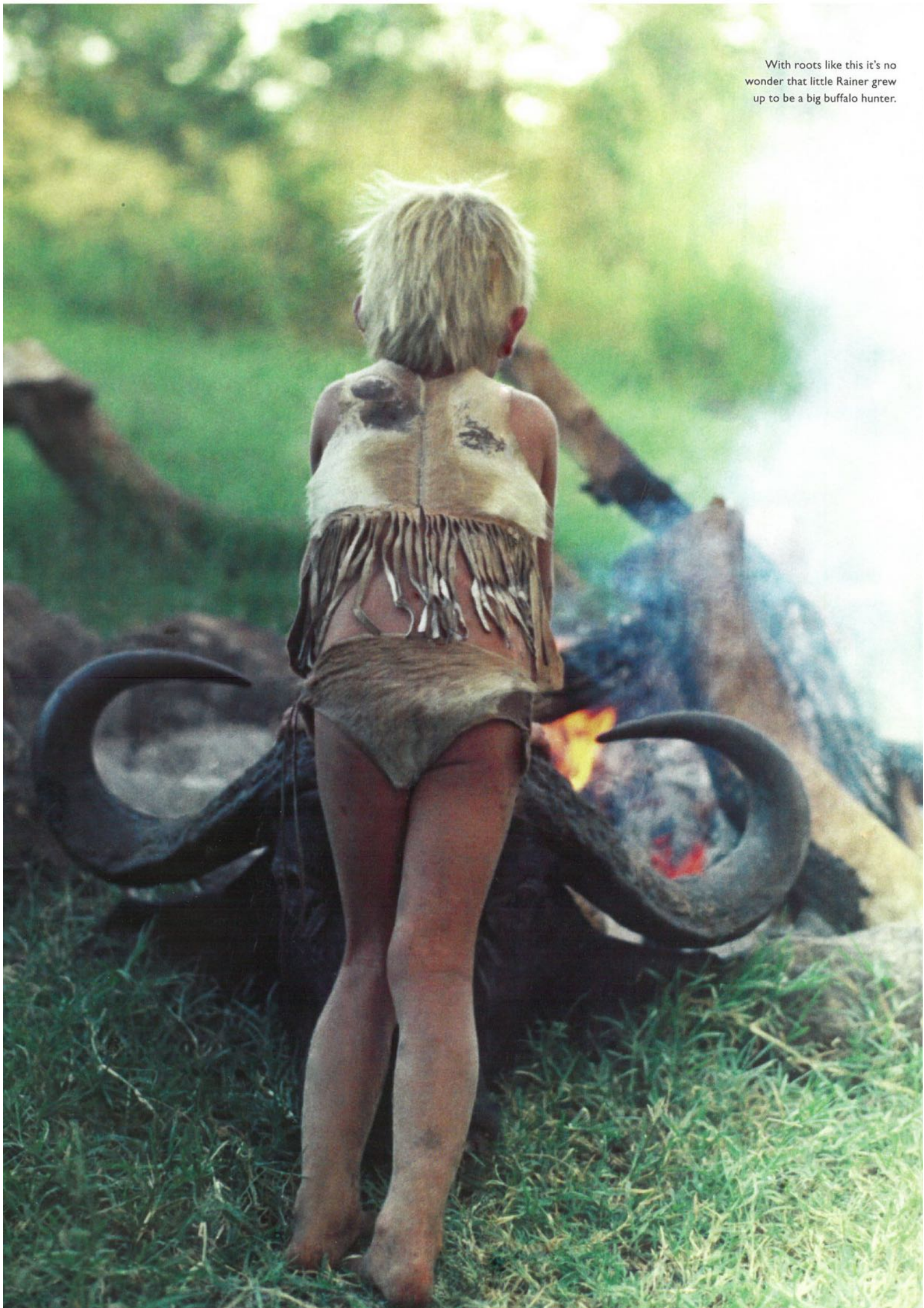


With roots like this it's no wonder that little Rainer grew up to be a big buffalo hunter.







Big Game Hunter and Film Producer

# The Buffalo Hunter

Photos: Rainer Joesch | Interview: Bernd Kamphuis

*Rainer Joesch is one of the few Germans who make a living from big game hunting in Tanzania. But Rainer is not only a hunting guide, he has become very well known through films of his buffalo hunts. Last year he produced his new film „Buffalo Hunters“, in which he achieved a standard of quality otherwise reached only by cinema film. There are many good reasons to question him more closely about his work.*

**Hunter's Path International: Rainer, how did you start hunting, and how long have you been hunting in Tanzania?**

**Rainer Joesch:** I grew up in the East African bush. My father, Juergen Joesch, was a passionate hunter, as were both my grandfather and great grandfather. Apparently hunting is in our blood. When I was twenty-three, in 1989, I began my career in Tanzania as a professional hunter.

**You're known as a buffalo hunting specialist. Where does this particular passion come from? How many buffalo have you hunted?**

As a five year old boy, with some friends, I had my first close encounter with buffalo along the Grumeti River in the northern Serengeti. They say your childhood stamps you for life. When I again encountered buffalo in 1988 it simply clicked. It was perfectly obvious that I had to move to Tanzania and hunt buffalo.

Buffalo hunting is the greatest. Several factors play a role for me here. I find it fascinating to be able to hunt an animal that I can stalk so close to. The intensity of the experience is an absolute priority. Certainly the potential danger of a charge from a hard-to-kill buffalo increases with proximity, but this only intensifies the experience. Additionally, the buffalo is a relatively common species, whose meat I can readily use. Thus, it is easy to hunt buffalo with a clear conscience. Over the last twenty years I have hunted approximately 480 buffalo, and have personally taken 36.

**Where do you hunt, and what other areas can you recommend for quality buffalo hunts?**

I have been on one buffalo safari in Ruanda and one in Kenya. Otherwise, I have hunted exclusively in Tanzania. For the last eleven years I have hunted almost exclusively in the Loosimingo Mountain area in Maasai Land in Northern Tanzania. There, the best populations of buffalo are in the centrally located Selous Game Preserve and in a few areas in the Southwest. Everywhere humans come in direct contact with buffalo, the population decreases rapidly. We'll probably soon only be able to experience healthy buffalo populations in game reserves where no humans are allowed to live. But even in the wildlife reserves and national parks there is sometimes heavy poaching, provided these areas are not subject to good control. For example, the peripheral zones of the Selous Game Reserve have a serious problem with meat poaching.

**Has hunting changed much in Tanzania over the past twenty years? What must a hunter be aware of these days?**

Hunting has changed tremendously; unfortunately, not for the better. Over the last two decades the human population in Tanzania has more than doubled. The loss of natural landscapes is a trend that is spreading continually farther and faster. In the past you could leave large areas to themselves, and nothing there would change. Today, areas that aren't protected are either





In searching for buffalo the ridges and hills are thoroughly glassed.





While mountain hunting it is common to walk between 10 and 20 kilometers daily. By the end of the season the PH has accomplished a real feat of physical endurance.



An ancient bull. A dream buffalo.



The latest technology was used while filming. Much of the work was done with HD cameras – with amazing effect.



inhabited or have been poached to the extent that there isn't any game left. The game animals aren't even safe in protected areas, if rangers don't actively and continuously patrol.

The hunting concessions in Tanzania are up for lease renewal in the near future. I'm anxious to see what happens. No safari or outfitting business will be willing to pay large sums of money over the long term, unless they are presented with a solid concept for the protection of both game and its habitat. Of course, not all companies are interested in the long term and many of the decisions of the wildlife protection agency really aren't based on the best interest and protection of game animals! Here, I'm thinking in particular of excessive shooting quotas and too few rangers in the hunting territories. There will be many accusations and discussions. In any case, the process and outcome will be interesting.

#### **How long have you been filming your hunts?**


It started with a request from "Hunters Video" to film a buffalo hunt in 1992. That film had the title "Buffalo Hunting", but it also appeared as "Buffalo Fever", and was available worldwide. At first I was only supposed to play the guide. In the end, however, I worked on the script, did the German and English translations,

and narrated both the German and English versions. That project gave rise to long association with Hunter's Video. I've worked on eleven projects with them.

**Your first film "Mountain Buffalo" was a great success. It is quite notable that you didn't toss out yet another run of mill film that shows kill shot after kill shot, rather you produced a film that presents terrific hunting excitement, beautiful landscape scenes, and gives a real feeling for the hunt. How is your new film different?**

The new film "Buffalo Hunters – The Mountain Challenge" is meant to be the beginning of an entire series of films that we're releasing internationally under banner of "Buffalo Hunters." "Buffalo Hunters" is a new kind of hunting film. As an avid hunter, the "hunting experience" is very important to me. I want to give hunters and non-hunters alike the opportunity to feel the excitement and emotions of the hunt, to allow them inside and to feel as though they are part of the hunt. As a film maker this is very challenging. That we, almost incidentally, examine very current topics such as trophy hunting and attempt to raise public awareness is mainly because of my holistic approach to hunting. I





Buffalo move across the face of the opposite mountain. The herd is mixed though. Rainer only hunts single bulls, or small groups of so called Dagga Boys.

want to bring across the "fascination of hunting," but also never forget the "responsibility of hunting."

**Aren't you moving contrary to the spirit of the times, considering the many videos, particularly American videos, show a kill shot every two minutes?**

Quite the contrary! Our film series fits in a niche that presently isn't occupied. Currently, the best films about African hunting are those by Craig Boddington. Craig is simply amazing. His films offer interested hunters all the necessary information on how to best prepare for a big game hunt.

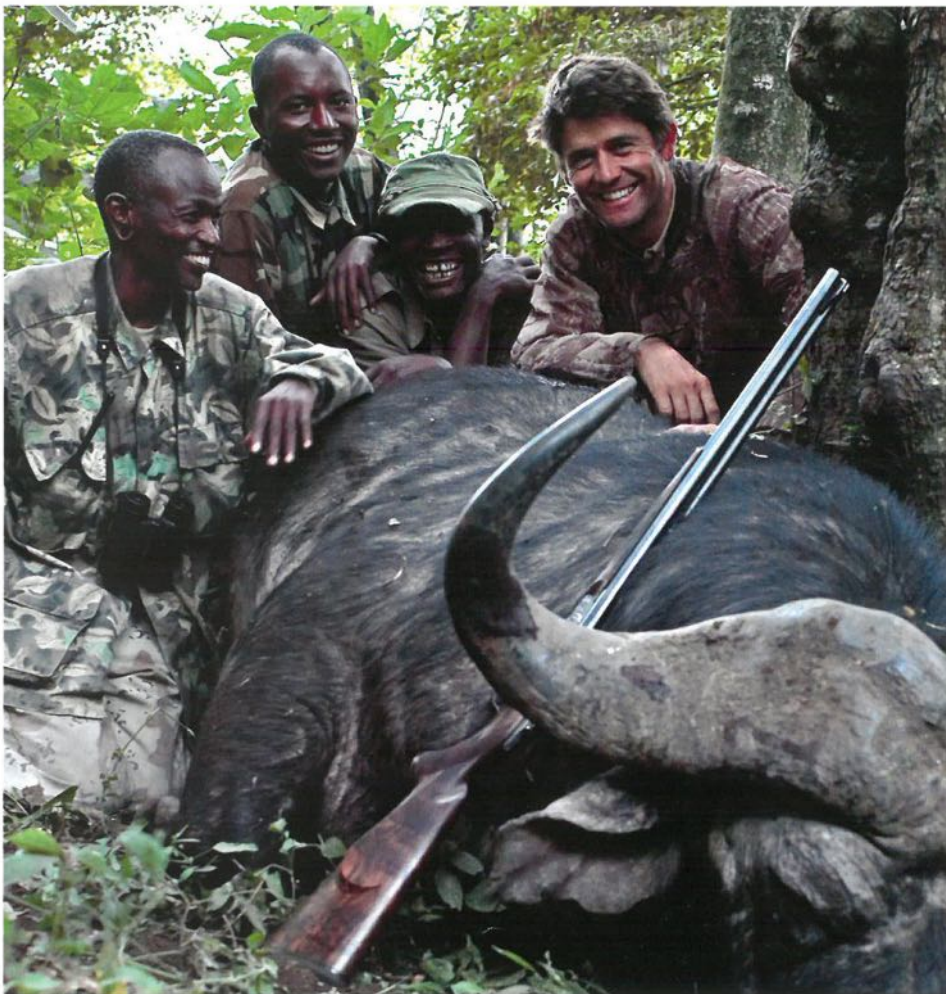
Our "Buffalo Hunter" series, however, is pure entertainment, but at a level that has never been achieved in the hunting film genre, until now. Have you ever seen a film where you can experience the excitement, disappointment, and success intimately and authentically? That kind of film doesn't yet exist. Such a film is very complex and elaborate. But that is exactly the kind of film hunters want. After a hard day at work they want to escape everyday life by watching a hunting movie. Like any good movie it must be exciting. The vast majority of "good reviews" for my film "Mountain Buffalo," by the way, have come from the United

States. That is a clear indication that even in the U.S., there are many hunters who haven't reduced hunting to mere shooting and collecting trophies.

**Are there any scenes where a buffalo charges? How many times in your hunting career have you been seriously charged?**

Up until now I've never been seriously charged. And it certainly isn't my intention ever to provoke a charge. Of course, there have been some close encounters. One was last fall while I was guiding for my 100th cape buffalo. Coincidentally, it was the buffalo that Yves Burrus shoots in the new film "Buffalo Hunters." And, a couple months ago, in February, my guest Christoph and I were practically run over. We were however lucky in our misfortune. The buffalo wasn't wounded. It just so happened that we were in thick brush and came too close. Apart from a few scrapes and bruises we were unharmed. The following day, after getting eleven stitches, Christoph couldn't think of anything better to do than hunt buffalo. A real tough guy! That sounds very dangerous. But danger is of course relative. During my first ten years in Tanzania, I guided for about 320 buffalo. In that period I was charged perhaps twenty times. In the last ten years I have





Rainer's "first" buffalo stems from several decades ago (above, Rainer is in the middle accompanied by his sister Maria and his brother Max). Over the years he has become a successful PH and film maker. He specializes in buffalo hunting. Particularly, hunting in the difficult terrain in the Mountains of Northern Tanzania is where his passion lies. He is a buffalo hunting purist, no vehicles, and always on foot. After all these years Cape Buffalos are still his favorite game animal. In the bottom photo he is with his trackers, Lorinyo, Lemiab, and a game scout (from the left).

guided for around 160 buffalo, mostly in mountainous terrain. There have only been five charges in that span.

A charge really only happens when the professional hunter fails somehow. When the buffalo notices the hunter and defends itself. The goal is to find a buffalo, and make a fatal shot, without the buffalo ever noticing the hunters. That is also the goal in the culmination of tracking a mortally wounded bull. You must move very carefully, and keep your nerves in check, even through you're in the thickest bush where you can literally feel the bull's presence.

**You put an enormous effort into this film. How many days did you film, and how large was your film team?**

We work with the best film team in the industry. Dirk Ruge from Colorado is an absolute professional behind the camera. Travis Ford from California is responsible for the field of audio and film editing. Then there is Sebastian Steinbrink, who takes care of a lot of organizational work. In Australia, our next location, we will work with two or three cameras.

By the way, we use Canon EOS D1 and D5 Mark II cameras that were not originally designed for video recording, but due to a full-frame sensor with professional lenses make excellent video. These cameras are a little more difficult to use for filming, but that the results are fantastic. We are planning a team of four people and twenty shooting days to complete our Australian film. Because of the difficult circumstances during "The Mountain Challenge," it took our team of five a full forty days to complete. By the way, our cameras record directly onto compact flash cards. During the evening we sit in a tent and watch hunting scenes, while they are being downloaded to a computer. This is insanely time consuming. During shooting days we work at least sixteen hours.

**How do you hunt accompanied by so many cameras? Is there a big difference compared to a normal hunt without cameras?**

Everything takes a little bit longer. The hunter must obviously be more pa-



tient and be aware that we hunt only if we can capture it on film. For this reason we always add extra days to the hunt, at our expense. For instance, the hunter pays for ten hunting days, and we hunt and film for fourteen. Since we only film one buffalo kill per hunter the hunter usually has the opportunity to hunt another buffalo and other game without being "bothered" by a camera. The actual hunt is filmed exactly as it happens -completely authentic. After the hunt a however we may have to reenact a few scenes that we couldn't capture during the hunt. Here we are primarily concerned with the steps of a successful stalk. We try to film as much as possible, but we cannot let the cameras run continuously, otherwise we would never finish downloading in the evenings.

**Planning a hunt is difficult, but hunting and filming success is particularly difficult when there are a couple cameras are following along. What worked well while filming? What didn't?**

Of course, there were a few buffalo that evaded us that we normally would have killed. But, as long as the hunter gets his buffalo in the end the missed opportunities only add to the overall experience. It is comparable to bow hunting. While bow hunting there are many situations where the game you are after could easily be killed with a rifle, but they are just not close enough for the bow. "The Mountain Challenge" was certainly the most difficult film project in the series. Perhaps our hunt for red buffalo in southern Cameroon will be just as difficult. For our Australia and Selous projects, I really see less of a problem. There it should be much easier to film super hunting and nature scenes.

**How are you planning to proceed? What are the next projects?**

The next projects involve the continuation of our "Buffalo Hunters" series. We just filmed hunts for Asian water buffalo in Australia. The DVD is set to be released at the end of the year (3 hunts, each 30 minutes long). In October we will be filming buffalo hunts in the Selous Reservation in Tanzania. In February 2012, our destina-

tion is northern Cameroon, where we will be hunting savanna buffalo. Then in June 2012, we will be in southern Cameroon filming hunts in the rainforest for red buffalo. After that the first leg of the "Buffalo Hunter" series will be complete. We will then have 13 or 14 thirty minute long films. The series is designed so that it can be shown on special Outdoor TV channels in both Europe and North America. We are in contact with several television channels in the outdoor segment.

**Is your "set list" of protagonists already full? Do you have films planned with woman doing the hunting?**

No, not yet. We are always looking for hunters interested in participating in our projects. The cost of the hunt is, however, for the most part the responsibility of the hunter. On the other hand, these hunts are meticulously planned. For such a project there must always be excellent team work between the outfitter, professional hunter, and film team. Success is very likely, otherwise we can't create an exciting high quality film. We provide the best conditions for a great hunt and memories of a great experience, which is also recorded on film as an added bonus.

**What are the challenges facing big game hunters in Africa nowadays? What challenges face professional hunters?**

That is a huge topic that goes way beyond the scope of this interview. But from my perspective, and greatly simplified, here are a couple points: Hunting in Africa has to be divided into two groups. The first group is hunting farms, where hunting takes place on private land that is often fenced. The second group is wilderness hunting, where hunting is on community property or in protected/concession areas. The problems with hunting in Africa is rarely farm hunting on private land because the landowner makes, in most cases, responsible decisions and these decisions are rarely cause negative far-reaching effects. This however applies only in very few cases of wilderness hunting. Here it is still often the case that nature is used as though it were an unlimited resource.

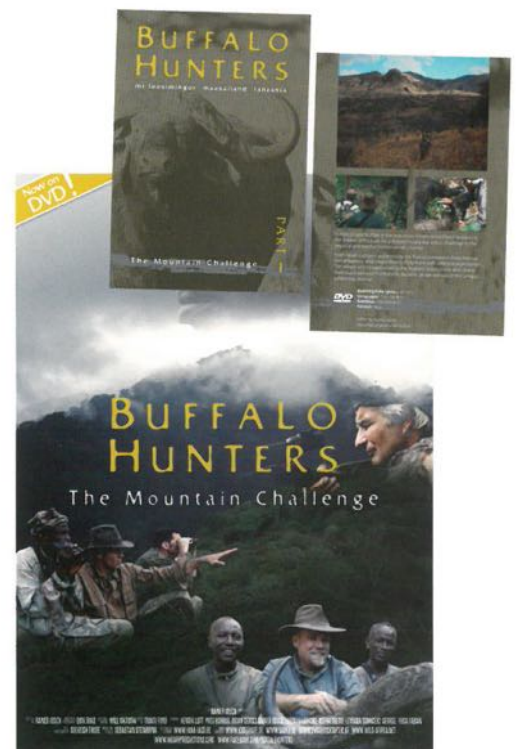
Especially concerning wilderness hunting, economic actions must always be based on principles of ecological sustainability. Unfortunately, this awareness and the resulting, responsible action among decision-makers is mostly pure lip service. This must change quickly.

**Thank you very much for your time and good luck with your upcoming hunting and filming projects.** ■



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[www.hatariproductions.com](http://www.hatariproductions.com)



A hunting DVD becomes a movie: the film poster to "Buffalo Hunter -the Mountain Challenge". The DVD is available at [www.jana-jagd.de](http://www.jana-jagd.de) and costs 29.95 Euros.