

THE VULTURES OF AFRICA

- After the Kill

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #15 —

In my experience, vultures are one of the unchanging features of an ever-changing Africa. They cruise around effortlessly in the air currents, all day long, looking for something to eat – generally what's left of an animal that was killed the night before, by one of the land predators. You might think of vultures as the daytime cleanup crew for Lion, Leopard and Hyena.

Although vultures often seem to follow a safari car, you probably won't notice them when you pull the trigger on

a trophy animal, but just wait; look into the sky after the pictures have been taken and there will often be hundreds of them –

seemingly coming from nowhere. It looks like a slow motion whirlwind, with vultures stacked up into the sky as far as the eye can see.

Depending on the circumstances of your hunt, your need for bait, and the species of your trophy, you may leave the meat in the field and bring back only the skin and horns. If this is the case, by the time you're finished and ready to drive away some of the lower-flying vultures will be landing in the trees.

Now, comes the interesting part. We had just shot a waterbuck and were keeping only the front skin and the horns. The sky was filling up with vultures and this looked like a great opportunity to get really, really close to them and observe their feeding frenzy; so we constructed a small blind just 15 feet from the carcass. It didn't take much, just a few sticks, some netting and of



The waterbuck carcass is just 15 feet in front of the blind, with the safari car in the rear.

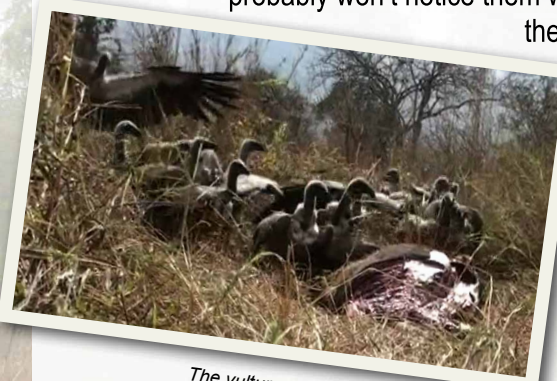
course the tall grass. We climbed into the blind and the safari car pulled away a few hundred yards. From the perspective of the vultures, dinner was now served.

It took only 20 seconds for the first vulture to land, a few feet from the carcass.

In another 20 seconds there were dozens on the ground and one got up enough courage to approach the carcass and take a bite. Then the feeding frenzy began. The carcass and ground around it were covered with vultures.

In 30 minutes, a 500 pound waterbuck was reduced to 50 pounds of bones. Wow; observing vultures up close, just after the kill, is an amazing experience – and only in Africa.

“It took only 20 seconds...”



The vultures – on the ground and landing. The noise was unbelievable.



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The feeding frenzy lasted only about 30 minutes.