

We'd been working the herd for nearly an hour, trying to get a shot. They had never winded us, but they knew something was wrong, and they were feeding along slowly, mostly listening and lifting their trunks to test the air. In open

mopane they would have spooked long before, but we were in the Zambezi Valley's legendary jess, that thick, nasty tangle almost impossible to hunt in. For most of that hour, we had been within twenty yards and able to only hear the elephants' soft rumbling and branches breaking as they fed, occasionally glimpsing a tall gray battleship above the forbidding mess.

For some of that hour we had been within ten yards. Close enough to know which one we wanted to shoot, but no hope of a safe shot. I had a tuskless permit, a good thing to have in this Valley area, which has too many elephants and a strong tuskless gene. We had spotted the herd feeding up from the Zambezi in open mopane, and at a distance professional hunter Ivan Carter spotted a big, old tuskless cow without a calf. Game on!

By the time we closed they had crossed the narrow belt of mopane and entered the deadly jess. We had glimpsed our intended target several times, but either there was no shot or other elephants were too close and too dangerous. In a herd, the hard part is to take the elephant you want without having to shoot your way in or out. A second tuskless cow complicated this because she had a young calf at heel. We caught a glimpse of her head and approached her once, then backed off very carefully when we saw that small gray form between her massive feet.

Now we were at an impasse. The elephant knew we were there, but they were supremely confident in the thick cover. We almost waved off, but with the wind still stable, Ivan suggested we give it one more try by circling around ahead of the herd. Then it got simple. The herd was feeding along an unseen elephant path, and all we had to do was walk quietly along that path right into the middle of them. The one we wanted, not only tuskless but also big-bodied and old with sunken withers and ribs showing, was feeding straight toward us at ten yards. Perfect, except, on the right side of the path, halfway between us and the elephant we wanted, stood another elephant with calf at heel.

We stood frozen for a long time, the elephant listening and feeding, and then the cow and her calf faded off into the jess, leaving us a clear, safe shot at the old tuskless elephant we wanted. I raised my rifle—and was stopped by Ivan. First he gently tugged on my sleeve, then he forcibly pulled me forward.

"We're clear. Now let's get close," he whispered.

Confidence Incarnate

Ivan Carter was born a Rhodesian, too late to be involved in the long bush war that concluded with his native land becoming Zimbabwe, but his timing was perfect to become a part of the safari industry that sprang up and grew rapidly in the peaceful postwar years. As a teenager, while his chums were

playing sports and chasing girls, Carter was off in the bush hunting "PAC" (Problem Animal Control) elephant and buffalo and learning what would become his trade. As a young man he served his apprenticeship and earned a Zimbabwe professional hunter's license.

In some countries a "PH license" means little, but no country in Africa has more rigid standards of apprenticeship and testing than Zimbabwe. Most hunters with extensive African experience regard Zimbabwe PHs collectively as Africa's finest today. In my own experience, as far as the basics of his trade are concerned, Ivan Carter is at least as good as his peers (which is saying quite a lot). One difference is that, during his early years, he came to genuinely love elephants first and foremost. As a professional hunter he hunts competently the full range of Zimbabwe species, but he specializes in elephants. Another difference is that, in addition to hunting, he has extensive experience as a national parks guide for photographic tourism. So he has studied elephants for the sake of studying them and filming them, not just from the standpoint of selecting a proper trophy and stalking it.

Life in Zimbabwe has not been all roses in recent years. His family farm was lost in the land reallocation, and today Carter and his wife live in the United States. He still does a full season in Zimbabwe and other African countries, and he has lectured widely on elephant behavior and management at such prestigious venues as Stanford University.

My filming partners and I were looking for serious ele-



With ears outstretched, this bull is clearly demonstrating. Carter demonstrates right back, raising his rifle vertically to make himself taller. Don't try this at home!

phant expertise as we prepared to start taping elephants as part of an ongoing series of African hunting DVDs. Good Zimbabwe professional hunters that we know and respect, such as Paul Smith and Andrew Dawson, universally told us we needed to spend some time with Ivan Carter. They were right. I have never been around anyone who possessed such in-depth knowledge of a single species, or that level of confidence in the presence of unquestionably dangerous game.

Carter believes that he understands elephants' body language—in the short time I've known him, I have seen him >