

## Sterile Freaks

For the last couple of months I have been standing quietly on the sideline, observing the “amazing investment opportunity scheme” unfold and mature. Yes, I am referring to the color variants bred all over South Africa. We have passed yet another breeding season with many an investor anxiously inspecting his 2-hectare “farm” every morning, hoping to spot some black newborn lambs. When he finds nothing, he blames it on the drought. No Mister Investor, it is not the drought, but it could be because your R500 000 black impala ram has only one testicle, or does not produce any sperm, or perhaps has an underdeveloped scrotum.

This is of course the result of intensive inbreeding, year after year. Not even to mention major other anatomical deformities that can only be observed from a dead specimen – over- or underdeveloped organs, such as lung, liver and heart. Recently I was told about a kraal buffalo with a heart three times the size of a normal one. He might have a 47” spread, but can he be regarded as a good representative of the species? All of the above is the result of a very limited gene pool of these freaks, like the black impala or golden gnu, which these investors originally found in the wild. The thousands of color variants found on farms today basically all descend from only a couple of individuals that originally occurred in the wild.

Then there are also new freaks bred from the original ones by investors, such as “royal impala”, “king springbuck” and many others. As all these animals are related, it is to be expected that anatomical deformities will be the order of the day.

But let us look at Mister Investor who still refers to a “kudu ram and ewe” or a “nyala ram”. He also talks about his “roland ward” impala and, my personal favorite, his “roland award” impala. Sir, please familiarize yourself with the basics like Rowland Ward before you call yourself a game rancher. Also take note of the following:

- Males in the wild need to compete before mating, thus ensuring that the best genes are passed on; it also helps with the production of more and healthy sperm. You offer none of these benefits to the animals on your 2-hectare “farm”. Your females have to make do with what you offer them, even if it is a black impala ram with one testicle.
- You may even find that your females refuse the male (the one with excellent genes that you specially selected from a top breeder), as they sense what you cannot – he is utterly useless! But what do they know; you have paid a fortune for this male and that is all that counts.

I have even heard of new “top investors” developing game pellets that will bring females into season earlier – yes, three impala lambs in two years! When all the breeders have bought from all the other breeders, Mr Investor, who are you going to sell to? Yes, I know, us hunters, but that is your story and you stick to it. With all the pellets and vitamins you feed your freaks, I am sure an impala ram in the thick Dwaalboom bush tastes much better than the black impala from your 2-hectare “farm”.

by Neels Geldenhuys, Publisher and Editor in Chief, African Outfitter

It is still early in the auction season but one can already see the trend - two years ago a bargain black impala ram sold for R800 000; now you cannot give it away for R150 000.

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