

OUR CAPTURE PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION

Chemical immobilization of wildlife is an expensive and high risk procedure that requires good preparation and awareness. Wild animals in a stressful situation will fight for their lives. In order to gain control of these animals and to minimise both stress and injury, we use highly potent drugs that are deadly for humans.

Human as well as animal safety is of utmost importance to us and we thus ask that you please familiarize yourself with this text and the procedure before the day of capture.

PREPARATION FOR THE CAPTURE

As mentioned above, dart work is expensive and high risk work. You can contribute a lot to minimise both the expense as well as the risk factors involved by having the ground team well briefed and organised **before** the capture starts by:

Organising suitable recovery vehicle(s) to pick up darted animals in the field. Depending on the number of animals to be darted and the size of the area in which the animals are to be darted, it may be advisable to have a number of vehicles and recovery teams available. This will drastically reduce the time needed to complete the capture (you will literally save 1000's of N\$ on chopper time alone). Recovery vehicles should:

- be cleared of items that clutter the loading surface and could potentially hurt an immobilized animal BUT have water for drinking and cooling animals as well as spare tyres,
- have sufficient space for both the animals to be loaded as well as the individuals that will handle it,
- wherever possible, the tailgate trallies should be removed, to allow for easy loading.

Organising a ground team(s) of handlers to restrain and load animals in the veld. As a rule a minimum of 5 physically able, strong and fit men are needed to load an adult Oryx/Sable bull. To take full advantage of multiple recovery vehicles in the field there must be a full ground team for each recovery vehicle.

All people on the ground team should be informed of the procedure as well as the correct way to behave around wildlife.

Handling an immobilized wild animal

Remember that an immobilized animal can still see and hear thus:

- Please keep loud noises to a minimum and do not



use cell phones when handling the animals.

- Place the face mask over the eyes (see picture)
- Focus on the animal so that the handling time is kept as short as possible.
- **NEVER** approach an antelope from behind and/or stand behind an animal if the animal's head has not already been properly restrained as described above. Especially Sable, Roan and Oryx have a nasty habit of lifting their heads, thus stabbing backwards!!!
- All antelope species must be placed and restrained on their chest at all times. The head is to be held up and the nose pointing to the ground. (see picture). This is to avoid potential regurgitated material going into the lungs.
- One person should stand in front of the antelope and grab and hold on to the horns at the base. This gives the handler the best possible control over the animal and has the least risk of causing horn base fractures in young animals.
- The handler firmly holds the animal's head (by the horn base) between his legs, covering the eyes (if no face mask is available). *This gives a single handler maximum control over the animal while minimising the risk of people being stabbed. In addition, the head will be kept in the correct position (nose down).*
- Where applicable, place plastic pipes cut to the correct length over the horns when handling the animal.
- If the dart is still in the animal, please do not take it out unless asked to. The darts have drugs dangerous to humans and it is very important to handle and dispose of the darts correctly. We appreciate that you inform us that the dart is still in, and we will gladly remove it. Where a situation dictates that you remove a dart(s) please place these darts into an empty screw top water bottle which you should give to us for safe disposal.

THE CAPTURE

Darting is done either from a helicopter or from the ground. Once the animal is darted it must be observed closely.

Most darted antelope species, usually start to show signs of being affected within 2 minutes and are "down" within 3-4 minutes. (spiral horned antelope take longer). Once the animal is down, the ground team must approach the animal carefully and quietly from the front, seize it by the horns or ears and place it on its chest with its head up and nose down. **DON'T** rush in (on foot or by car) on an animal if it has not gone down yet! Doing this, will stimulate the animal to get up and start running again and may lead to injury and/or death of the animal.

The animal is then placed on a carrying mat, with front legs inside the pocket. The back end of the mat is folded over the back of the animal, which may then be lifted onto a recovery vehicle or trailer.

While the animal is being transported, the head must still be held up with the nose down. By lying on its chest with legs tucked under the body, the animal has the least chance of kicking and thereby injuring either itself or the people around it.

TREATMENT

While the animals are immobilized, we routinely treat them with a standard protocol consisting of a long-acting sedative, long-acting antibiotics, multivitamins and a deworming treatment. Depending on the species and even the individual animal, this regimen can be altered to include certain vaccines and other drugs/treatments. It is also during immobilisation that we place any requested ear tags and/or microchips.

RELEASE

Upon arrival to either a truck or a new camp, the animal is loaded off the vehicle with the aid of the carrying mat. Once the animal is in place, the carry mat is pulled out (on a truck) or opened up (in the field).

The animal will now be given an antidote to reverse the effect of the immobilising drugs. If given intramuscularly, the animal should wake up slowly and be on its feet within a few minutes. This is the preferred method when the animal is on a truck, so that it will not wake up with a jump and injure itself. If the animal is reversed in the veld, the antidote may be given intravenously which usually gives a fully conscious animal within half a minute.

Once reversed, the animals may show different reactions to their new surroundings. It could be by jumping up and running away, walking quietly and curiously around, or even by charging. It is thus important that all members of the ground crew are in safety (on a vehicle and a respectful distance away) and that disturbances (noise, cars revving, people smoking etc.) are kept to a minimum.

RISK

Even though we take every precaution and pride ourselves in a very low mortality or injury rate, we can never guarantee a positive outcome of every game capture operation. Before such an operation is started, the buyer and seller must agree on who will carry the risk of possible losses and at what stage the risk is transferred from buyer to seller.

CONCLUSION

The farmer/buyer/seller and their assisting ground team(s) have a very considerable influence on both the cost (chopper hours and time needed to complete a capture) as well as the eventual outcome (survival, injury and mortality rate) of a capture operation. It thus makes sense to optimise things in your favour and be properly prepared!