# The Blesbok (***Damaliscus pygargus phillipsi***): A Comprehensive Monograph on Ecology, Management, and Hunting Strategy

## 1. Introduction: The Keystone of the South African Highveld

In the vast and varied tapestry of Southern African wildlife, few species occupy a position of such ecological and economic centrality as the Blesbok (*Damaliscus pygargus phillipsi*). Endemic to the interior plateau of South Africa, this medium-sized antelope is a quintessential symbol of the Highveld grasslands. For the game farm operator and the visiting hunter alike, the Blesbok represents a unique intersection of conservation success, commercial utility, and sporting challenge. Historically, this species traversed the treeless plains in herds numbering in the hundreds of thousands, a "brown tide" that shaped the vegetation dynamics of the interior. Today, following a dramatic recovery from the brink of extinction in the late 19th century, the Blesbok stands as the bread-and-butter species of the South African game industry.1

This report serves as a definitive operational guide for game reserve management and a detailed briefing for the prospective hunter. It moves beyond superficial descriptions to explore the nuanced biology, behavioral ecology, and sustainable utilization of the species. By examining the Blesbok through the dual lenses of the ecologist and the professional hunter, we gain a holistic understanding of how to manage populations effectively and how to pursue them ethically. The narrative that follows details their evolutionary history, their intricate social behaviors, the ballistics required to harvest them cleanly, and the culinary arts dedicated to their utilization.

### 1.1 Taxonomy and Evolutionary distinctiveness

The Blesbok is a member of the family Bovidae, falling within the tribe Alcelaphini. This tribe, which also includes the Hartebeest (*Alcelaphus*) and Wildebeest (*Connochaetes*), is characterized by high shoulders, sloping backs, and elongated skulls—adaptations evolved for endurance running and grazing in open environments.3 Specifically, the Blesbok is a subspecies of *Damaliscus pygargus*, sharing its specific epithet with the Bontebok (*Damaliscus pygargus pygargus*).

The taxonomic relationship between the Blesbok and Bontebok is a subject of significant management importance. While they are genetically distinct enough to be classified as separate subspecies, they are close enough to hybridize readily if barriers are removed. Evolutionarily, they diverged due to geographic isolation. The Bontebok was isolated on the coastal plains of the Western Cape, adapted to the Fynbos and Renosterveld biomes, while the Blesbok evolved on the cooler, elevated interior plateau (Highveld).4 This separation created phenotypic differences—the Bontebok displays a rich, purplish-gloss coat with a continuous white facial blaze, whereas the Blesbok has a duller, brown coat and a blaze typically divided by a brown band between the eyes.1 Understanding this distinction is critical for game farmers, as the accidental mixing of these subspecies leads to hybrid offspring (often called "Bonte-Bles"), which threatens the genetic integrity of the rare Bontebok and holds reduced conservation value.5

### 1.2 Historical Distribution and the Conservation Renaissance

To appreciate the current status of the Blesbok, one must understand its history. Early European explorers and Voortrekkers in the 17th and 18th centuries documented the interior of South Africa as being teeming with game. The Blesbok was arguably the most numerous antelope, favoring the sweetveld grasslands of the Free State, southern Transvaal (now Gauteng and Mpumalanga), and parts of the Northern Cape.2 They were strictly a plains species, avoiding the thick bushveld and forests that would impede their vision and movement.

However, the late 19th century brought catastrophe. The Blesbok's habitat was prime agricultural land, and their tendency to gather in dense herds made them easy targets for market hunters seeking skins and meat. By 1893, the free-roaming populations had been annihilated, with numbers crashing to fewer than 2,000 individuals surviving in a handful of isolated pockets.1 The species was effectively functionally extinct in the wild.

The recovery that followed is widely cited as the first major triumph of the private game ranching model. Farmers, recognizing the resilience and value of the species, began fencing off remnants of herds. Unlike the sensitive Roan or Sable antelopes, Blesbok proved robust, breeding rapidly and adapting well to fenced environments. This transition from "wild vermin" to "valued livestock" saved the species. Today, the population is estimated to exceed 240,000 individuals, distributed not only within their historical range but introduced widely across South Africa, Namibia, and even Zimbabwe.4 They have adapted to biomes far outside their evolutionary niche, including the thick Acacia bushveld of Limpopo and the arid scrub of the Karoo, provided that open clearings and water are maintained.7

## 2. Morphology and Physiological Adaptations

For the hunter observing a herd through binoculars, or the manager assessing herd health, a granular knowledge of Blesbok morphology is essential. Their physical form is a direct reflection of their adaptation to the open grassland niche.

### 2.1 Biometrics and Physical Dimensions

The Blesbok is a medium-sized antelope, bridging the gap between small gazelles and large grazers like the Wildebeest. There is significant sexual dimorphism in body mass, though less so in visual appearance, which complicates field judging.

**Table 1: Biometric Data for Adult Blesbok**

| **Parameter** | **Adult Ram (Male)** | **Adult Ewe (Female)** | **Notes** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Live Weight** | 70 – 85 kg (154 – 187 lbs) | 55 – 70 kg (121 – 154 lbs) | Rams are significantly heavier and more muscular in the neck.1 |
| **Shoulder Height** | 95 – 105 cm (37 – 41 in) | 85 – 95 cm (33 – 37 in) | Distinct sloping back profile typical of Alcelaphines.1 |
| **Head-Body Length** | 140 – 160 cm | 135 – 150 cm | Compact, robust body structure.1 |
| **Tail Length** | 30 – 45 cm | 30 – 45 cm | Ends in a black tuft of hair.1 |
| **Lifespan** | 12 – 15 years | 12 – 15 years | Up to 17 years in captivity.3 |

### 2.2 Coat Coloration and Markings

The coat of the Blesbok is a study in camouflage and signaling. The dorsal hair is a reddish-brown, which can appear quite dark, almost purple-black, in older rams, especially when viewed in low light. A characteristic "saddle" of lighter, fawn-colored hair sits across the shoulders and back, creating a two-tone effect that is visible from a distance.4 The rump is also a lighter yellowish-brown, but crucially, it lacks the prominent, bright white square rump patch that distinguishes the Bontebok.

The most diagnostic feature is the face. The name "Blesbok" is derived from the Afrikaans/Dutch word "bles," meaning a blaze (typically used to describe the white mark on a horse's forehead). This blaze runs from the horn bases to the nose. In the vast majority of pure Blesbok, this white line is interrupted by a horizontal brown band just above the eyes, effectively creating two separate white patches: a forehead patch and a nose patch.1 Hunters should note, however, that this band can be faint or broken in some individuals, which can sometimes lead to confusion with Bontebok hybrids, though the coat luster usually clarifies the identification.

The underparts, including the belly and the inside of the buttocks, are white. The legs present a specific pattern: the upper legs (thighs) are brown, but the lower legs (shins/cannons) are whitish or cream-colored. There is also a small, distinct white patch on the upper front leg, just behind the shoulder.4

### 2.3 Horn Configuration

Unlike Impala or Kudu where only males carry horns, both Blesbok rams and ewes are horned. This evolutionary trait suggests that females may need weapons to defend feeding territories or calves in the open plains where hiding is difficult. The horns are "lyrate" (lyre-shaped), growing outwards and backwards before hooking slightly forwards and inwards at the tips.10

The horns are heavily annulated (ringed) for the bottom two-thirds of their length, with smooth, pointed tips. A key visual characteristic is the color of these rings. On Blesbok, the ridges of the rings are typically a light straw or yellowish-white color, contrasting with the dark brown or black grooves between them. This is a vital field sign; Bontebok horns are typically solid black.12

### 2.4 Glandular Systems and Sensory Organs

Blesbok possess well-developed preorbital glands located immediately in front of the eyes. These glands secrete a sticky, black, waxy substance that carries a unique olfactory signature. Territorial rams actively use these secretions to mark their domain, rubbing their faces against tall grass stalks or shrubs, leaving a visible black smudge.8 This chemical communication is essential in the open veld where visual markers might be less permanent.

Their sensory adaptations are geared towards predator detection in open environments. The eyes are placed high and on the sides of the skull, affording a wide field of view to detect movement on the horizon while grazing. Their hearing is acute, supported by white-lined ears that act as parabolic reflectors, and their sense of smell is highly developed, used to detect predators upwind and to facilitate social bonding within the herd.8

### 2.5 Color Variants: The Product of Selective Breeding

In the modern game ranching era, the Blesbok has become a canvas for genetic selection. Recessive genes, which would occur naturally but rarely, have been isolated and amplified by breeders to create distinct color morphs. While biologically the same species, these variants hold different market values and aesthetic appeals.6

1. **White Blesbok:** This is not an albino. It is a leucistic form, meaning it lacks melanin in the hair but retains pigment in the skin, nose, and eyes. The coat is a creamy white or light blonde. They were first noted in the 1960s and have since been bred in large numbers. Initially rarer and more expensive, they are now almost as common as the standard variant on many farms.5
2. **Yellow (Golden) Blesbok:** A variant with a golden-yellow coat, lacking the dark brown pigmentation of the common Blesbok but darker than the white variant.14
3. **Copper Blesbok:** A deep, reddish-copper morph. This variant is distinct from the Golden Blesbok and often commands high prices at auctions due to its striking appearance and relative rarity compared to the White Blesbok.6
4. **Saddleback Blesbok:** A specialized morph where the standard markings are altered to accentuate the saddle pattern.

For the hunting client, these variants offer the opportunity to hunt the "same" animal multiple times to collect different color phases. However, ethical hunters and purist conservationists sometimes view the proliferation of these "designer" animals with skepticism, preferring the naturally evolved wild-type coloration.16

## 3. Ethology and Behavioral Ecology

The behavior of the Blesbok is dictated by the rhythms of the grassland and the pressures of social hierarchy. Understanding these behaviors is the key to a successful stalk.

### 3.1 Social Organization

Blesbok are gregarious and social, but their herds are structured by a strict hierarchy.

* **Nursery Herds (Female Herds):** These groups consist of adult ewes and their offspring (lambs and sub-adults). They can range in size from small family units of 5–10 animals to massive aggregations of nearly 100 individuals on large reserves.11 These herds are nomadic within the reserve, moving to follow the best grazing.
* **Territorial Rams:** Adult males, typically over 2.5 years old, establish static territories. A ram will defend a patch of ground ranging from 2.5 to 6 acres, depending on the quality of the grazing.1 He marks this territory with dung middens—circular piles of accumulated droppings—and preorbital gland secretions. He is often seen standing solitary in the center of his domain, or "herding" a group of females that has entered his territory, trying to keep them there to mate.11
* **Bachelor Herds:** Males that are too young, too old, or too weak to hold a territory form bachelor herds. These groups are generally loosely associated and wander the periphery of prime territories. They serve as a reservoir for future territorial rams. Hunting clients looking for old, worn-down trophy rams often find success scanning these bachelor groups for an old "dagga boy" (a term usually reserved for buffalo but applicable to the temperament of old rams) who has been ousted.8

### 3.2 Daily Activity Cycle and "Head Nodding"

Blesbok are diurnal, with peak feeding times in the cool of the early morning and late afternoon. During the heat of the day (11:00 AM – 3:00 PM), they exhibit a behavior known as "shade seeking," often standing in the shade of Acacia trees or, if no shade is available, standing in a cluster with heads lowered, facing away from the sun.11

A peculiar and frequently observed behavior is vigorous **head nodding** or shaking. A Blesbok will lower its head and violently jerk it up and down. While sometimes a territorial display (head flagging), in summer months, this is almost invariably caused by the **Nasal Bot Fly** (*Oestrus* spp.). The female fly attempts to deposit live larvae into the nostrils of the antelope. The larvae migrate to the frontal sinuses to develop, causing severe irritation. The Blesbok's frantic nodding, snorting, and foot-stamping is a desperate attempt to dislodge these parasites or prevent the fly from landing.12

* **Hunting Insight:** This behavior is critical for the rifle hunter. A Blesbok that is nodding is a difficult target. The head movement can obscure the vital triangle of the neck/shoulder junction, or the animal may jerk at the moment of the trigger pull, leading to a miss or a wounded jaw. Patience is required to wait for a pause in the irritation.

### 3.3 The Rut and Reproductive Cycle

The breeding season (rut) on the Highveld typically occurs between March and May. During this period, the territorial rams become intensely active and aggressive.

* **Territorial Display:** Rams will engage in "parallel walks" with rivals, stiff-legged and posturing. If intimidation fails, they engage in horn-clashing fights. These battles can be violent, sometimes resulting in injury or broken horns.
* **Courting:** Rams will chase ewes, sniffing their hindquarters to test receptivity (flehmen response). A ram will circle a ewe, trying to block her path and keep her within his territory boundaries.
* **Lambing:** After a gestation of roughly 240 days (8 months), lambs are born in mid-summer (November–January). This timing ensures that the lactating mothers have access to the lush green grass generated by summer rains. Blesbok lambs are precocial "followers"—unlike Reedbuck or Duiker that hide their young, Blesbok lambs can stand and run with the herd within minutes of birth, a necessary adaptation for avoiding cheetahs and jackals on the open plains.4

### 3.4 Reaction to Threats: The "Follow-the-Leader" Escape

When alarmed, Blesbok do not scatter chaotically. Instead, they exhibit a disciplined escape response. They will run upwind in a single-file line, often led by a dominant female. They maintain a steady canter, sometimes breaking into a gallop.

* **Hunting Insight:** This predictable behavior allows a hunter to anticipate their movement. If a herd is spooked, they will often run for several hundred meters and then stop simultaneously to look back at the threat. This pause offers the hunter a brief, static shot opportunity. Additionally, they are known to "pronk" (leap with arched backs) when excited, though less spectacularly than the Springbok.11

## 4. Habitat and Dietary Ecology

The ecological footprint of the Blesbok is defined by its diet. It is an **obligate grazer** and a **water-dependent** species, traits that dictate its distribution on a game farm.

### 4.1 Grazing Preferences

Blesbok are selective bulk grazers, with a strong preference for short, sweet grasses (*Themeda triandra*, *Cynodon dactylon*, *Eragrostis* species). They favor open grassland plains (Highveld) and are particularly attracted to areas that have been recently burned or mowed, where the new growth is fresh and high in protein.10

* **Sourveld vs. Sweetveld:** While they prefer sweetveld (nutrient-rich year-round), they can survive in sourveld (nutrient-poor in winter) areas if supplementary feed or licks are provided. In sourveld regions, their condition drops significantly in winter, and game managers must ensure protein licks are available to prevent mortality.10
* **Browsing:** While primarily grazers, isolated observations suggest they may browse on Karoo bushes or shrubs during severe droughts, but their digestive system is not specialized for this.8

### 4.2 Water Requirements

Unlike the Gemsbok or Springbok which can extract moisture from roots and tubers, the Blesbok must drink surface water regularly, typically once a day. This dependency means they rarely wander more than a few kilometers from a water source. On hunting farms, this makes waterholes a focal point for their daily movement, particularly in the late morning or early afternoon.1

### 4.3 Habitat Management

For the landowner, Blesbok are excellent "lawnmowers." They keep grass short, which can facilitate the grazing of other species like Springbok and Black Wildebeest. However, because they are selective, overstocking can leads to "patch grazing," where they hammer palatable grass species into the ground while ignoring unpalatable tufts, leading to veld degradation. Rotational grazing and strict population control via hunting harvests are essential management tools.

## 5. The Hunt: Strategies, Gear, and Ballistics

Hunting the Blesbok is often the entry point for novice hunters in Africa, yet it remains a staple challenge for experienced sportsmen due to the animal's keen senses and open habitat.

### 5.1 Hunting Strategies

The terrain dictates the tactic. Since Blesbok inhabit open plains, the hunt is visually driven.

1. Spot and Stalk (The Classic Method):

The hunter and Professional Hunter (PH) will glass from a high vantage point or a slowly moving vehicle to locate a herd. Once a target ram is identified, the stalk begins on foot.

* *The Approach:* Blesbok have excellent vision. Stalking requires using every termite mound, grass tuft, and depression in the ground for cover. The "golden rule" is to never walk directly at the herd. A direct approach signals predation. Instead, hunters should "tack" like a sailboat, moving at angles that make it appear as though they are passing by the herd.
* *Wind:* The wind must be right. Blesbok have a keen sense of smell. Stalking downwind is futile.
* *Distance:* Successful stalks usually result in shots taken from 150 to 250 meters. Getting closer than 150 meters to a Blesbok herd on an open plain is a test of true fieldcraft.10

2. Ambush (Voorsit):

For bowhunters or older clients unable to walk long distances, blinds placed at waterholes or mineral licks are highly effective. This is best done during the dry season when water dependency peaks. Alternatively, ambushes can be set along fence lines or game paths that herds use to transition between bedding and feeding areas.

### 5.2 Rifle and Caliber Selection

The Blesbok is deceptively tough. It is often described as "tenacious" or "hard to put down." A poor shot will result in an animal that can run for kilometers, often requiring a grueling follow-up.

**Table 2: Recommended Calibers and Ballistics**

| **Caliber** | **Bullet Weight** | **Suitability** | **Notes** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **.243 Winchester** | 90 – 100 gr | Minimum | Adequate for culling or youth hunters, but requires surgical shot placement. Avoid on quartering shots or large rams.19 |
| **6.5mm (Creedmoor / Swede)** | 130 – 140 gr | Excellent | High sectional density ensures deep penetration. Low recoil allows for accurate shot placement. Currently a favorite among PHs.19 |
| **7mm (7x57, 7mm-08, 7mm Rem Mag)** | 140 – 160 gr | Ideal | The 7x57 Mauser is legendary in Africa. Offers a perfect balance of trajectory, penetration, and knockdown power.19 |
| **.30 Cal (.308 Win,.30-06)** | 150 – 180 gr | Versatile | The standard. A.308 with a 165gr bullet is arguably the perfect Blesbok medicine, handling bone impacts and quartering angles with ease.19 |
| **.300 Magnums** | 180 gr+ | Overkill? | Effective for long-range shots across open plains, but risks excessive meat damage if standard soft-point bullets are used. |

Bullet Construction:

Because Blesbok are often shot at intermediate ranges where velocity is still high, bullet integrity is crucial. Premium, controlled-expansion bullets (e.g., Barnes TSX, Swift A-Frame, Nosler Partition) are recommended over standard cup-and-core bullets. A frangible bullet may splash on the Blesbok's humerus or shoulder blade, failing to penetrate the vitals.20

### 5.3 Shot Placement

African antelope anatomy places the heart and lungs slightly lower and further forward than in North American deer.

1. **Broadside:** The ideal shot. Trace the back line of the front leg upwards. Place the crosshairs one-third of the way up the body. This destroys the top of the heart and the lungs. If the animal is on high alert, aiming "high shoulder" (halfway up, directly on the shoulder bone) will anchor the animal by breaking the skeletal structure, though this sacrifices some shoulder meat.19
2. **Quartering Away:** Aim for the off-side shoulder (the front leg on the far side). The bullet must enter behind the ribs and traverse the chest cavity.
3. **Frontal:** Only recommended for experienced marksmen. Aim for the "soft spot" at the base of the neck, where it joins the chest. *Warning:* Ensure the animal is not dipping its head to nod (bot fly irritation) when firing.19

## 6. Field Judging and Trophy Evaluation

For the trophy hunter, the primary challenge is not just hitting the Blesbok, but ensuring the target is a mature ram of trophy quality. Mistakes are common because ewes also carry horns.

### 6.1 Distinguishing Rams vs. Ewes

Shooting a female by mistake is a cardinal sin in trophy hunting.

**Table 3: Sex Differentiation Guide**

| **Feature** | **Ram (Male)** | **Ewe (Female)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Horn Bases** | **Thick and heavy.** Bases are close together, often light yellow/white on the front surface. | **Thin and spindly.** Bases are narrower, appearing like pencils rather than cigars.7 |
| **Horn Color** | Ridges (rings) are often noticeably lighter (yellow/white) against the dark grooves. | Generally darker, lacking the bold contrast of the male's ridges. |
| **Body Mass** | Thick, muscular neck. Heavier built shoulders. | Slender neck, lighter frame. |
| **Penis Sheath** | Visible button/sheath on the underbelly (requires good optics). | No sheath. Teats may be visible. |
| **Behavior** | Solitary or tending females. Aggressive posturing. | Associated closely with lambs or other females in the herd. |

### 6.2 Estimating Trophy Size

A "good" Blesbok trophy is defined by the length of the horns and the circumference of the bases.

* **Length:** A mature ram will have horns measuring 15 inches (38 cm) or more. The world record exceeds 20 inches, but 16-17 inches is considered excellent.
* **Shape:** Look for a wide spread and a distinct "recurved" shape where the tips hook back inward.
* **Bases:** The bases should be thick. If the white bases look like they are almost touching, it is likely a mature ram.

### 6.3 Scoring Systems

Hunters typically record their trophies in one of two record books:

1. **Rowland Ward (RW):** The historic standard. It measures the **length of the longest horn** along the front curve.
   * *Minimum for entry:* 16 ½ inches.22
2. **Safari Club International (SCI):** The modern standard. It measures the **total score** (length of both horns + circumference of bases).
   * *Minimum for entry:* 40 points.
   * *Gold Medal:* ~43 points.22

**Note on Measurement:** To measure, use a flexible steel tape. Start at the base on the forehead, follow the center of the front curve over the ridges, and continue to the tip. Do not press the tape into the grooves; bridge the ridges.25

## 7. The Harvest: Venison, Butchery, and Utilization

In the African context, the hunt does not end with the shot. The utilization of the carcass is of paramount importance. Blesbok venison is highly regarded and commercially significant.

### 7.1 Meat Characteristics

Blesbok meat is deep red, fine-grained, and extremely lean. It has a distinctive gamey flavor—often described as "herby" or aromatic due to the essential oils in the Karoo bushes and sweet grasses they consume.27

* **Fat:** The fat is yellow. Unlike beef fat, game fat has a high melting point and can coat the palate unpleasantly. It is also prone to going rancid quickly. It is standard practice to trim all visible yellow fat from the carcass during processing.28

### 7.2 Primary Cuts and Usage

The breakdown of a Blesbok carcass mirrors that of a sheep or small deer.

* **Fillet (Tenderloin):** Situated inside the ribcage along the spine. The most tender cut. Best eaten fresh, pan-seared quickly to rare/medium-rare.
* **Backstrap (Loin):** The long muscle along the outside of the spine. Excellent for steaks or whole roasts. *Chef's Tip:* Do not overcook. Blesbok loin has zero intramuscular fat; cooking past medium turns it into liver-textured leather.29
* **Hindquarters (Leg):** The heavy lifting cuts—Silverside, Topside, Thick Flank. These are ideal for roasting (if larded with bacon to add moisture) or, most commonly, for making **Biltong**.
* **Shanks and Neck:** High in collagen and connective tissue. These cuts are tough but flavorful, making them the prize ingredients for **Potjiekos** (stews) where slow cooking breaks down the collagen into gelatin.30

### 7.3 Culinary Heritage: Recipes

The preparation of Blesbok is deeply rooted in South African culture.

The Potjiekos (Little Pot Food)

This is a slow-cooked stew prepared outdoors in a cast-iron, three-legged pot over coals. It is a social event as much as a meal.

* **Method:**
  1. Heat oil and lard in the pot. Brown the Blesbok neck/shank pieces (bone-in adds flavor). Remove meat.
  2. Sauté onions, garlic, and bacon (the bacon provides the necessary fat).
  3. Return meat. Add red wine, beef stock, and herbs (thyme, coriander, rosemary/kapokbos).
  4. Simmer gently for 2–3 hours. The liquid should bubble slowly ("pruttel").
  5. Layer vegetables on top: potatoes and carrots first, then softer veggies like zucchini or mushrooms later. *Crucial Rule:* Do not stir the pot once the veggies are added. Let them steam on top of the meat sauce.
  6. Serve with rice or "pap" (maize porridge).30

Traditional Biltong

Biltong is not jerky; it is cured and air-dried, retaining a softer texture.

* **Preparation:** Use the silverside or topside. Cut into strips roughly 2-3cm thick, slicing *with* the grain.
* **The Cure:** Mix coarse salt, brown sugar, black pepper, and toasted coriander seeds (crushed, not ground to dust). Coriander is the signature flavor of Biltong.
* **Process:** Sprinkle meat with brown vinegar (to deter flies and mold) and coat thoroughly in the spice mix. Let it marinate in a cool place for 4-12 hours depending on thickness.
* **Drying:** Hang the strips in a cool, well-ventilated area (a Biltong cabinet with a fan is ideal) for 3–5 days. The meat is ready when it is firm on the outside but still maroon and slightly moist in the center.27

## 8. Tracking and Signs: Reading the Veld

For the hunter, interpreting the signs left by the Blesbok is part of the immersive experience.

### 8.1 Spoor (Footprints)

Blesbok hooves are heart-shaped but elongated, typical of the Alcelaphine tribe.

* **Dimensions:** Front hooves are approximately 70mm long x 45mm wide. Hind hooves are slightly smaller (65mm x 40mm).33
* **Characteristics:** The toe tips are pointed and often slightly splayed, especially on soft ground. The impression is deeper at the toe than the heel. The track is generally narrower and sharper than that of an Impala.33

### 8.2 Dung (Scat)

* **Appearance:** Small, black pellets, often clustered together. When fresh, they are shiny and moist.
* **Middens:** The most obvious sign of Blesbok presence is the **dung midden**. Territorial rams defecate repeatedly in the same spot to mark ownership. These middens appear as circular patches of accumulated pellets on bare ground. Finding a fresh midden (with warm or moist dung on top) indicates a territorial ram is in the immediate vicinity.8
* **Differentiation:** Impala also use middens, but Impala dung pellets are slightly more elongated and "pointed" at one end compared to the rounder Blesbok pellets. Additionally, Impala middens are often located in bushier cover, whereas Blesbok middens are in open clearings.34

## 9. Conclusion

The Blesbok is a testament to the resilience of nature and the efficacy of value-based conservation. From the brink of extinction, it has rebounded to become a pillar of the South African wildlife economy. For the game farmer, it is a reliable, productive asset that manages the veld and generates revenue. For the hunter, it offers a challenging, fair-chase pursuit that demands skill in stalking, judging, and marksmanship.

Whether admired for its stark white face against a Highveld thunderstorm, pursued across the frost-laden plains of the Free State, or enjoyed around a campfire as a steaming potjie, the Blesbok is an integral thread in the fabric of the African safari experience. Understanding its biology, respecting its behavior, and utilizing its resources ethically is the responsibility of every hunter who steps onto the red earth of Africa.

### **Appendix: Quick Reference Fact Sheet**

| **Category** | **Data Point** |
| --- | --- |
| **Scientific Name** | *Damaliscus pygargus phillipsi* |
| **Conservation Status** | Least Concern (Population Increasing) |
| **Typical Habitat** | Open Grassland / Highveld Plains |
| **Water Dependency** | Water-dependent (Drinks daily) |
| **Rifle Choice** | 6.5mm, 7mm,.308 Win, 30-06 |
| **Shot Placement** | Low Heart/Lung (follow front leg up 1/3) |
| **Trophy Benchmark** | 15 inches (38 cm) |
| **SCI Minimum** | 40 (Total Score) |
| **RW Minimum** | 16 ½ inches (Longest Horn) |
| **Meat Yield** | ~55% of live weight (High carcass yield) |
| **Cooking Tip** | Low fat content; lard with bacon or slow cook. |

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