



# THE OTHER BIG FIVE:

BY GERALD L. WARNOCK, M.D.

# Hungary?

**H**ungary, a central European country the size of Kentucky, has long been a favorite hunting ground for Europeans, but has remained a relative unknown to American hunters. Perhaps one reason is the country's topography, which is relatively flat with no seacoast and no mountains. That was not always the case, as the division of lands following World War I left Hungary in this landlocked situation.

Species that might be of interest to American hunters such as ibex, chamois and brown bear are not available in Hungary. In fact, the five species comprising the "Big Five" are roe deer, red deer, fallow deer, boar and mouflon. Since all of these species can be taken in most European countries, why would one want to hunt in Hungary? For starters the friendly people, the great food and wine, and the superb hunting lodges but, primarily, the sheer numbers and amazing quality of the trophies. At Pilis Park alone, the annual kill is 1,000 red deer, 200 fallow deer, 300 mouflon, 900 roe deer and 3,000 boars. The other hunting companies have comparable statistics.

The overwhelming majority of Hungarian hunting is on government land. Each of the

twenty-some Hungarian "counties" has its own forestry department and each forestry department has its own hunting company. These companies eagerly compete one with another for local and foreign hunters, and the majority of foreign hunters are from Germany, so knowing some basic German is very helpful in the high seat.

The leaders of these companies had realized for some time that they were missing a large potential source of revenue from American clients. Enter Zsolt Kohalmi and the leaders of the Hungarian SCI chapter who, in concert, conceived the notion of a joint donation hunt. The Hungarians had never exhibited at SCI before, and any Hungarian presence was through a generic European booking agency. The result of those talks was a donation of five individual hunts from five individual hunting companies spread over a two-year period and designated the "Hungarian Big Five."





The five species cannot be hunted at one time, given the timing of the seasons. Roe deer opens in late spring and closes well before fallow deer opens. I spent some time trading emails with Zsolt as to timing of the hunts, and relied fully on his counseling. The first hunt was in early September 2010 for roebuck in the SEFAG region where we stayed in a small, but comfortable guesthouse.

Roebuck are best hunted in the spring with short grass or emerging crops where the small deer can be seen. Being late in the year, we hunted mowed fields and over already harvested crops. After three days, I was successful in taking one very nice buck and one smaller one. The donation of each company was for one specimen with no limits on size, and any others taken were charged at the going rate.

When the roebuck was harvested, we went through the traditional Hungarian ceremony with two of the guides blowing the hunting horns in concert through a particular melody holding a somber requiem for the taken quarry. We saw a number of red stags at that venue, but the red stag donation was from a different company, so we left and motored to the flood planes of the Danube River.

The Gemenc concession is a vast expanse of mostly very flat land that is generally planted in crops with little forestland evident. We stayed at the renowned Karamancsa hunting castle where the longstanding world record CIC red stag was taken in 1986, and where he hangs on the wall at this time. There is a large full body bronze of the same stag at the entry.

The hunting here was much different from any red stag hunting I had done previously. The majority of the crops were corn, which, in September, is

8 to 10 feet tall. Even though we heard many stags roaring and saw corn stalks wiggling, we could not see the animals other than an occasional glimpse of a horn tip. Success depended on catching them crossing an entry road and mostly being lucky. I had little success at that, and on the fourth day we moved to a soybean field. The soybeans there grow luxuriously and, although one could see the stags well, the hinds and young were almost obscured by the high soybean vines.

Early on a cool morning, we heard a stag roar some distance away and, as the light improved, could see a large stag and several hinds slowly approaching through the bean field. I was willing him toward us with appropriate body English and within a half hour I came to the point where I felt I should take the shot. I was pleased to have taken Zsolt's advice on calibers and brought a flat-shooting .300 Weatherby Magnum as the shots at the roebuck and red stag were all more than 250 yards.

He was not a tremendous red stag, his skull weighing nearly 8 kg. All Hungarian deer trophies are rated by the weight of the skull and horns 24 hours after the skull is boiled and cleaned. I had decided to take only the skulls of these deer for European mounts, and entrusted these trophies with the forestry companies to be returned to me the following year after my second trip.

Planning for the following year, the hunt that requires optimum timing is the fallow deer. It is well known that the last ten days in October are the prime time for the fallow rut in Eastern Hungary. Thus began our second phase of the Big Five quest.

Our consultant and host, Zsolt, picked us up at the airport. As in the prior year, clearing of firearms

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# The Other Big 5

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A plaque at Karamanča commemorates a visit from Kaiser Wilhelm, II. There were many photos of his wife, Isabella, with large stags displayed in the castle.

and ammunition was quite simple and straightforward and the delay at police/customs was minimal on both occasions. Zsolt drove us the three hours to the Nyiererdo concession of Guth from which several world record fallow deer have been taken over the years. This area at Guth is very flat with a few slight ridges, but the elevation difference is not more than 50 feet in the whole area. It is mostly oak forests with very little agriculture. As at Karamanča castle, the current number one CIC fallow deer was taken at this venue, and rests on the wall for all to see.

At Guth we stayed in a large traditional multi-story hunting lodge of log cabin-type construction. This was the only hunt where we encountered more than a handful of other hunters. Being the prime fallow deer hunting grounds and the prime dates, that was no surprise. Most of the other hunters were Hungarians.

This hunt was among the most unique experience of my life, as the sheer number and size of the stags was overpowering. The combined groan of the rutting call of the males provides a continuous drone heard for a long distance from the rutting grounds. Although there were scattered stags roaring and rutting with individual hinds, the majority of the breeding takes place at established lek — an area of an acre or so within the dense oak forest denuded of leaves and other ground cover and is one big muddy field. Five or six stags stand within the central portion of this clearing with an occasional female scooting around between the males. There are occasional skirmishes with larger stags showing their domination and there are a number of satellite stags around the edges of the arena.

I never actually saw mating occur, but we did not spend more than an

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hour or so at each visit. It was not a situation where one had lots of time with field glasses to study racks and horns and critically judge the palms, points, mass etc., so I left the selection of the trophy to my guide. The first evening I chose to abstain from shooting, and just enjoy the show.

The following morning, I took a nice stag that my guide thought was a high gold medal. We left before I knew the weight of the stag and either its CIC or SCI score, so I have no idea how he stacks up. Zsolt was looking for a particular stag with abnormal antlers, but was unsuccessful and left that day. The following day, I took another, much larger stag that I am told by E-mail weighs 5.2 kilos — only 200 gm below the CIC record in weight (no score yet).

With two hunts to go, we motored from there to the Pilis Park concession, which is not far from Budapest. It is at this concession where the current CIC world record wild boar was taken in 2003 and his tusks are mounted on a plaque on the wall of the lodge. Unfortunately, they did not donate a boar at this forestry company, and it was here where I was to take my mouflon.

It is noteworthy that all big game hunting in Hungary is fair chase, unfenced and not genetically manipulated like many other European companies. The exception is mouflon, which the government does not want spreading to adjacent regions. Consequently, they have mandatory perimeter fencing. The lodge was superb, with a more modern theme than the others with superb food and wine.

This was the toughest of the hunts, due primarily to the weather. An occluded front had moved in so we had drizzle and fog for four days straight and basically saw no game. As in many other hunting situations, the day is divided into a morning hunt and an evening hunt and this was no exception. On Day 5 at daylight, there was no fog and no rain, and early on we spotted a very nice solitary ram.

My guide took one look and said take it, which I did, again at near 300 yards. He measured it 86 cm for the longest horn, but I have no clue how that stacks up in the Hungarian or SCI record book. In any case, he is a beautiful ram.

From there, we moved to our last hunt and that was on the grounds of the Gyulaj (pronounced July) in Southwestern Hungary. That area has very large red stags, some fallow deer,



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good roe deer, and is not particularly renowned for its boars. Still, this is the outfit that donated the boar hunt.

Most boar hunting in Europe is done from a high seat in the late evening on into darkness without the aid of artificial lights. I was equipped for this with a Schmidt and Bender 3.5-10X scope with an illuminated European reticle. The first evening on a high seat, we heard boars (and sows) making all sorts of noises from a distance away. They were approaching our Hochsitz, and sounding as if they should soon come into sight when suddenly it was totally quiet. A wind shift stopped that hunt cold.

The next morning, we went stalking before daylight and shortly after visible light, my guide, Pietr, spotted a boar in the adjacent pasture outside of our wood lot. Generally, if one can see the tusks on a boar it is probably a "shooter." The one tusk was sticking above the gum perhaps two inches, maybe three, and Pietr said to shoot it, which I did. It took us some time to drive around on the far side of the fence and get to the boar. When we came up to it, it was obvious the boar was a large animal with a nice tusk on the "up" side, but we were not prepared for what appeared when we rolled him over.

The opposite tusk was amazing. He did not have an upper incisor with which the inferior tusk rubs to keep it sharpened. Accordingly, there was nothing to keep the lower tusk from growing, and it grew in a full circle and was growing back into the back of the jaw. We were not able to measure it because we could not extract the tooth from the jaw after being boiled. The one tusk was very nice and what I can guesstimate on this one is that it will be very, very near the number one SCI wild boar, and certainly within the top five. Talk about luck.

I had three more days before our return flight and I spent those hunting boar the next day without pulling a trigger, having difficulty topping the prior day's trophy. I spent two more days hunting red stags and saw some very nice ones but, again, none bettering my prior. From there we returned to Budapest, where we stayed in the Meridian Hotel on the banks of the Danube and enjoyed the local citizenry. Zsolt entertained us royally with a departing dinner at the Fisherman's Bastion on Castle Hill overlooking Budapest with a fantastic view of the city. The food and drink were superb, capping off a terrific hunt for the Hungarian Big Five. 🐾



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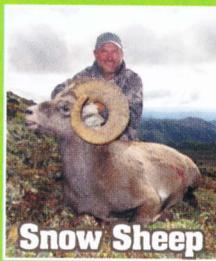
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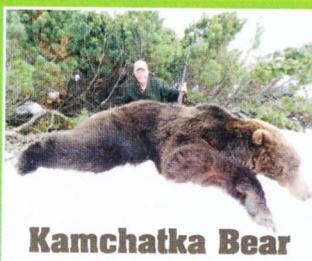
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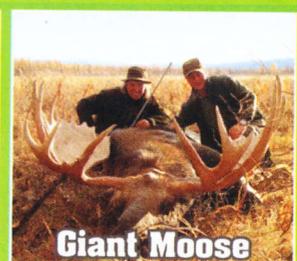
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