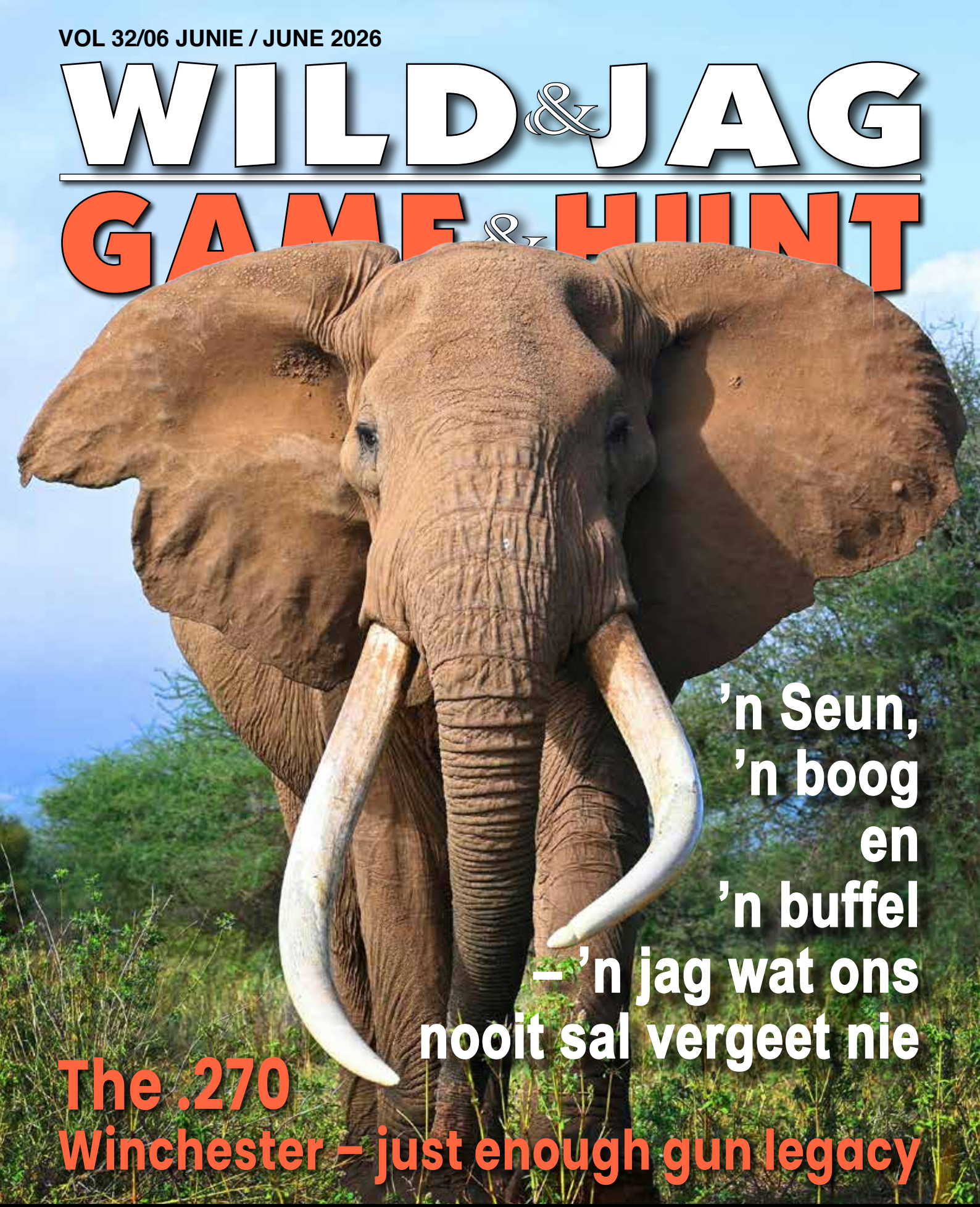
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WILD & JAG
GAME & HUNT



’n Seun, ’n boog en ’n buffel – ’n jag wat ons nooit sal vergeet nie

The .270 Winchester – just enough gun legacy

HIKMICRO Stellar SX60LS 3.0 Thermal Scope



Dangerous

encounters of the buffalo kind: Part 5

By Cleve Cheney

Saved by the fence

Another buffalo incident occurred one morning when my colleague Gawie Lindeque and I were driving along the Parks boundary fence. This was done regularly as an anti-poaching measure and to look for any breaches in the game fence. This fence runs adjacent to the tar road leading to the Kruger Park Orpen Gate entrance. Suddenly, up ahead, we saw a buffalo on the wrong side of the fence. It was on the main road instead of being inside the Park's boundary fence. The moment it saw us, it charged and hit the game fence with tremendous force right next to the vehicle. Fortunately, it was well constructed and electrified, and it held. The buffalo bounced off it like a ping pong ball, leaving some skin and blood on the barbed wire.

Photo: Hans Veth @Unsplash



Because the buffalo was outside the Park fence and thus outside our jurisdiction, we radioed the Mpumalanga Parks Board ranger at the Manyaleti Game Reserve about the problem. There was heavy vehicle traffic on this road – tourists heading for the Park and locals walking or cycling along it – and this agro buffalo could pose a threat to life and limb. We had scarcely sent the radio message when we saw a taxi filled to capacity with locals, slowing down to view the animal. True to form, the buffalo took exception to being looked at and charged the taxi. Fortunately, the driver had the vehicle in gear and floored the throttle. With the engine revving to a maximum and tires screeching, leaving smoke and burnt rubber behind, he roared off down the road, the buffalo in hot pursuit, hooves clattering on the tar road. What a hilarious sight!

We continued our fence patrol and eventually turned around to head back home, driving along the fence line again. When we arrived back at the place where we had first seen the buffalo, lo and behold, there he was again, and on seeing us, he charged again, hitting the fence right next to me, not more than a meter or two away. Again, the fence held. Man alive, I was grateful! The buffalo turned and ran off. There was long grass on the road verge that concealed a deep culvert. We heard the buffalo fall into the ditch, then scramble up the other side, run across the main road, and head off into the tribal area. Had we been on foot and not had a fence between us, Gawie and I would have been seriously injured or killed. The Manyaleti ranger radioed us later in the day to say that they had searched for the buffalo, but could not find it.

Colleagues who survived buffalo attacks

Chris Bakkes – Kruger Park Trails Ranger

Chris Bakkes was on his way home to his station at Orpen Gate. He was in his private bakkie and decided to head home along the western boundary fence of the Park, which was shorter than taking the main tar road to Satara. The bush track crossed a number of what were usually dry riverbeds. Recent heavy rains, however, had caused some of these small streams to run strongly, and some were still quite waterlogged. As Chris attempted to cross one of these riverbeds, his bakkie sank into the waterlogged sand up to its axles. Chris was experienced enough to know that it was pointless trying to get the vehicle unstuck, and, being only 12 km from Skukuza, decided to walk back to get help. He buckled on his belted holster, which held his .44 magnum revolver. This action would save his life. Walking nonchalantly along the road, he was enjoying the walk and just being out in the bush when, suddenly and for no apparent reason, a buffalo came charging out of a thicket toward him. As Chris turned to face the buffalo, it hit him in the chest and hurled him against the boundary fence, which catapulted him back so that he landed between the buffalo's horns and along its back. The buffalo shook Chris off, and as he landed on the ground, the animal proceeded to force its boss onto Chris' chest in an attempt to gore him. The ranger had the presence of mind to remember his handgun and, drawing it from the holster, pressed the muzzle against the side of the buffalo's neck and fired a shot. Now, a .44 magnum revolver would not normally be considered a weapon for protection against an angry buffalo, but in this case, it had the desired effect, and at the shot the buffalo turned and ran off into the bush, leaving Chris with abrasions, battered, bruised, and cut from the barbed wire fence he had been thrown into. He was bloody, and his uniform was torn. He looked a sorry sight when he arrived back at Skukuza, where he was acclaimed by the local young ladies as a hero who had fought off a buffalo and had survived an attack by this huge animal. For Chris (who was later to lose an arm in a crocodile incident), it was worth the pain and discomfort. He was lucky to have survived with his life. Was it an unprovoked attack? Too little is known about the buffalo, which was never seen again, even though rangers searched for it, not wanting a wounded buffalo to pose a threat to staff or tourists. Perhaps the neck shot hit a vital artery or vein, and it went off to die in the bush. We will never know.

Don English – Kruger Park Ranger

Don was carrying out a buffalo culling operation from the Parks Board helicopter. When shooting from the air, it is difficult to deliver a brain shot because the brain is a small target of about 11 cm in diameter (**Figure 2**), and the buffalo is

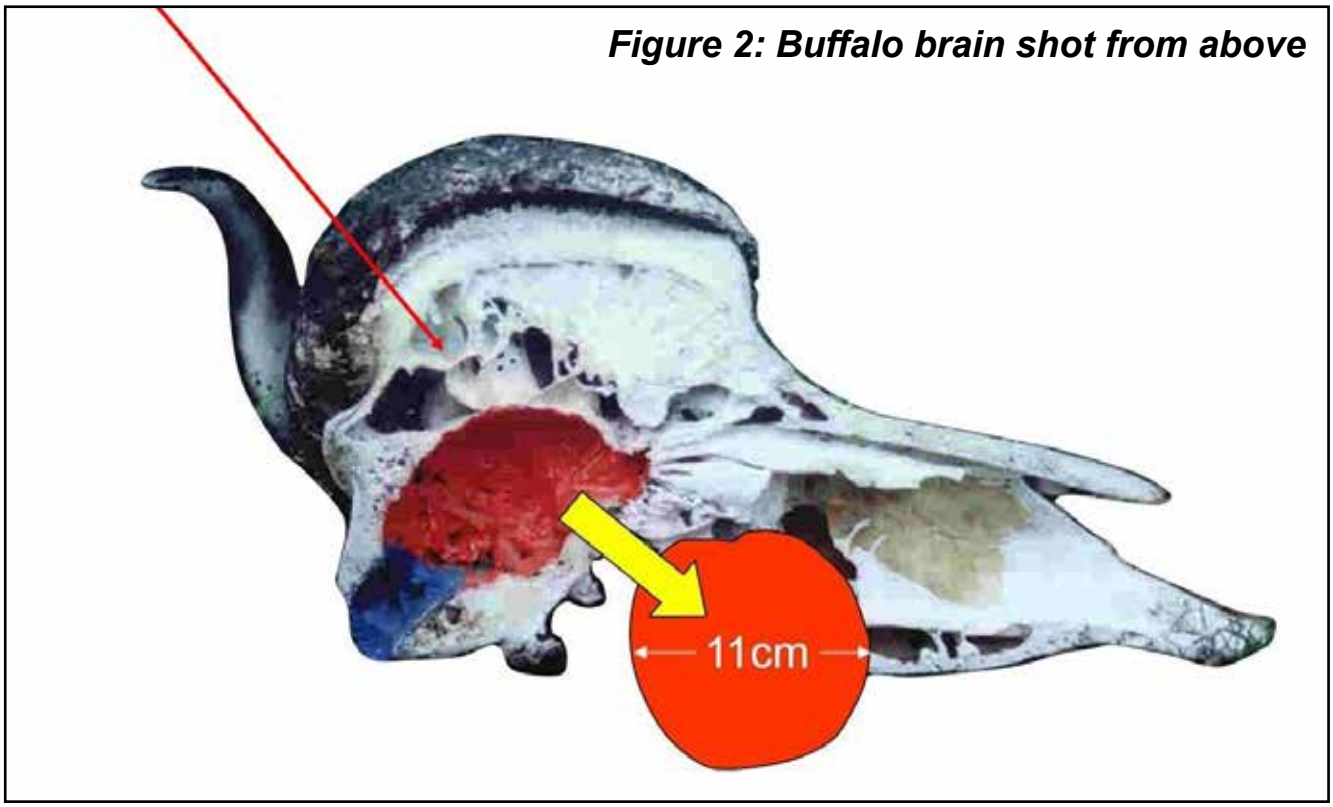


Figure 2: Buffalo brain shot from above

running away from the helicopter, with its head moving up and down. Shooting from a moving platform at a small, moving target requires excellent marksmanship, and Don is a good shot. The most effective aiming point when shooting from above out of a helicopter is where the shoulder blades meet at the top of the back. It is a relatively large target compared to the brain and is not protected by the boss and heavy cranial bones as the brain is (**Figure 3**). If a shot hits some-

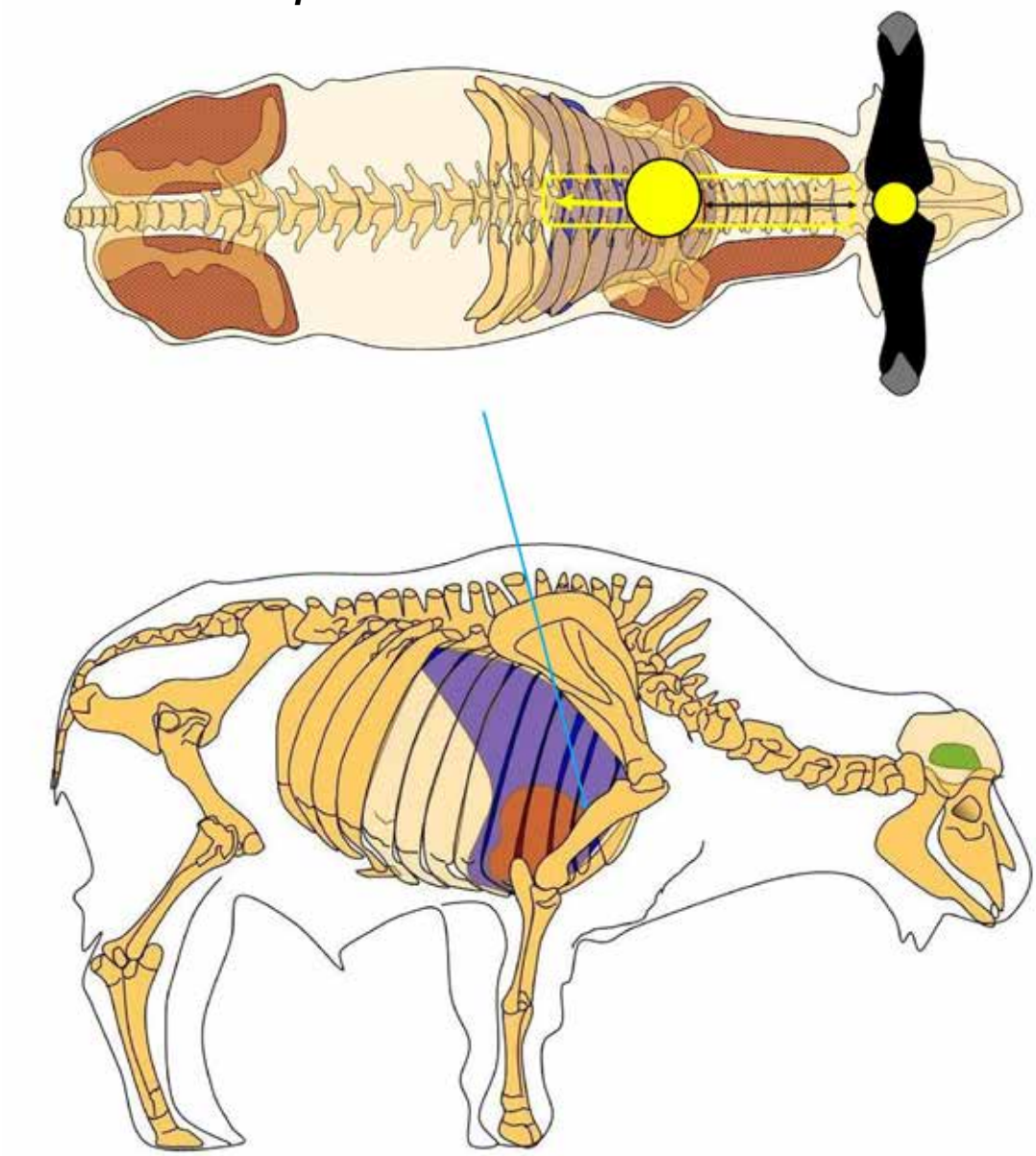


Figure 3: Shot from the air

where along the back (a spinal shot), it will immediately incapacitate the buffalo, and it will fall. A steeply angled shot from above with a well-constructed bullet that misses the spine can also penetrate to the heart and or a lung (**Figure 4**).

Don dropped three buffalo, and the helicopter landed so he could go out and give each one an insurance shot. As he approached one of the buffalo, 20 m from him, it suddenly stood up and charged. It had obviously not been hit in the spine. Don had expected only to give insurance shots and took some old soft-point bullets he wanted to get rid of to do the job. Unfortunately, soft-point bullets are not intended for frontal brain shots on charging buffalo. At 10 m, Don fired, knowing he would only have time for one shot. The buffalo stumbled momentarily but followed through with the charge. Don dived to the right to avoid the buffalo, but it swiped his legs out from under him, and Don fell. He was

Figure 4: Buffalo shot placement from above



tossed two or three times into the air, landing each time on exactly the same spot. His rifle had been knocked flying. He was very lucky not to have been disemboweled, but somehow Don kept his head and rolled away each time the buffalo tried to get his horns under him. The buffalo then forced his boss down onto Don, exerting tremendous pressure. Don heard bones cracking in his body. He then had the presence of mind to hook his arms around the curve of the buffalo's horns and hold himself tightly up against the animal to avoid being hooked by the deadly horns. He was literally face-to-face with the enraged bull.

Then, suddenly, the bull collapsed on him. The initial shot from the helicopter and the attempted brain shot from the ground finally took their toll, and weakness overtook the wounded animal. Don was able to crawl out from under the buffalo, which was not yet dead. The helicopter pilot ran over with Don's R1 military rifle and handed it to him, and Don was finally able to dispatch the wounded animal. Don got into the helicopter, which flew straight to Skukuza, where the doctor, informed by radio of the incident, was waiting to administer first aid.

Although badly injured, Don still got out of the helicopter and walked over to the doctor (**Figure 5**). He is one tough man. The helicopter then flew him directly to Nelspruit, where he was admitted to intensive care (**Figure 6**). He had severe lacerations, bruising, lung and liver haemorrhaging, three damaged nerves, kidney damage, a cracked vertebra, and three fractured ribs. It took him two and a half years to fully recover. Don bears no grudge. Buffalo are still his favorite animal. In Don's words, "the buffalo only did what it knows to do - it was injured, and it was retaliating to defend itself."

And therein lies the truth about buffalo. If left alone, they are relatively placid animals, but if threatened, injured, sick, cornered, or wounded, they will fight to defend themselves or others in a herd in an attempt to survive, and that is reasonable – it is what all living creatures do.

Figure 5: Don English after buffalo attack



Figure 6: Don English in hospital

