



# NAB YOURSELF

Put your best boot forward. Take up *The Field* and Hunter Balmoral Macnab Challenge this year.

# A MACNAB

It's the ultimate sporting test, says **Alexandra Henton**

**T**HE clarion call is sounded. It is time to shrug off the *ennui* and head into the field again as we launch the second *Field* and Hunter Balmoral Macnab Challenge. Following last year's success we invite another batch of would-be Macnabbers to enter the ultimate sporting challenge: to shoot a stag, catch a salmon on the fly and bag a brace of grouse all within 24 hours. The 25 most intrepid Macnabbers of all hues, as judged by the Editor, will receive a pair of commemorative cuff-links. All participants will receive an invitation to an event to be held later this year. For rules and terms and conditions, as well as an entry form and updates, go online to [www.macnabchallenge.co.uk](http://www.macnabchallenge.co.uk). The closing date for the competition is 10 November, 2011.

The Highlands is the setting for Buchan's story and the spiritual home of the Macnab. But to widen the field and protect our pockets we've added new categories and more accessible challenges. Just remember to bring your Hunter gumboots.

A Macnab inspires the doughtiest of sportsmen to misty-eyed reminiscences. But however one approaches it, one thing is certain – you can never guarantee a Macnab. Therein lies its siren appeal. The hill can bring any sporting champion to his knees. There is no pride to be had in an unfairly caught salmon or a badly shot beast. When chasing a Macnab, honour is all but even the skilled need to pick the right place to start. And if you are in need of some expert advice before the off, we offer this guidance.

*Field* contributor Adrian Dangar believes "no Scottish estate can really guarantee all three parts of the Macnab". The estate where he bagged his Macnab had "a productive river and obliging forest but few grouse". In fact, the grouse ended up being the easiest part. He "didn't shoot the stag until it was nearly dark". His advice is to "consider what the estate is known for and tailor your day accordingly. Catch the salmon first. The fish is the only quarry species that's a willing participant."

Spontaneity is a large part of the excitement of bagging a Macnab, and the fish-before-breakfast rule is favoured by most. Sporting agent Mark Merison insists that the maxim "don't lie to your game book" holds firm when Macnab mischief might be on the cards. A fraternal Macnab during the week gave some urgency to his attempt but with the fish left until last: "It proved to be the only fish I lost all week and while we might have filled the requirement (legally but unsportingly), a ➤

**Take our advice: pick the right estate for you and follow the fish-before-breakfast rule (left)**



**Clockwise from above: John Fields Jr shooting grouse; Joe Thompson's spectacular salmon; a proud Ruairidh Cooper; and Marc Sale fishing**

Macnab must above all be sporting." He has, however, set his cap at the Macvermin.

Tarquín Millington-Drake thinks "the original Macnab is still the best". Sporting fervour can often take an unexpected course. He says, "If one gets the stag and the grouse and is really struggling for a salmon, go to the nearest waterfall, put catch-and-release aside for a moment, and shoot the salmon as it jumps the falls, as the grandfather of a friend of mine once did. Make sure you have one of those fish-retrieving labradors at hand."

Altering the traditional Macnab is a way for sporting estates to showcase what they have to offer. Johnny Scott, who visited Ben Loyal for an action-packed day after a goose, a stag and a brown trout, says, "Estates are opening up their markets and encouraging fishermen to have a go at something else. These alternative days are also pleasingly affordable. The whole thing is very doable, especially the winter version – a goose, a woodcock and a hind."

There are other methods of motivation. Dylan Williams was accompanied by his wife who offered a 10-year-old Bruichladdich

whisky after the salmon, a 12-year-old taster after the stag, with the promise of a 15 year old after the grouse. It worked, though Williams insisted that it had everything to do with the "professionalism and knowledge" of the estate gillie, keepers and stalkers.

Rory Knight Bruce describes the classic Macnab as "the Cresta of Scottish sport". Over the years he's tried it in every order, only ever getting two out of the three. "The crucial thing is the fish, so first check the water and likelihood of success. Travel light with plenty of food and water, and a small hip flask for the gralloch. No 'nip' will ever taste as good."

Sporting agent Charlie Brownlow hasn't yet tried to achieve a Macnab but always holds the possibility in mind. "If I were to set out to get a Macnab I would forgo the grouse and try for two stags as they do in the book," he says. His advice for the classic Macnab is, "Start on the river well before breakfast. Go for the end of September or October for the best chance."

For something completely different, there is an enormous variety of game in South America. Nick Zoll was running a Patagonian fishing lodge when a group of English guests bagged an unusual Macnab: a guanaco (Argentinian llama), a Darwin's Rhea and a brace of trout. March to April is the best time

for the Patagonian stag rut but for *The Field's* challenge you'd have to head north.

Last year's Macnabbers have some sterling advice for this year's buchaneers. Dean Hemmings claimed a classic Macnab last year and urges, "pick the right estate" and fish first. "Make sure you're confident in your choice of fly, up to speed with your knots and lines and make sure your leader's fresh, so it won't break. You do *not* want to lose this fish!" Marc Sale is adamant that the planning must be done "with military style and precision".

Ruairidh Cooper who bagged his last year reiterates the importance of choosing the right estate: "Picking the right day makes it easier to catch a salmon," he says. He recommends "keeping an eye on river conditions and picking a day when the levels are dropping and the water is clearing. I would suggest bagging the stag first and then the grouse before concentrating on the fish." It certainly worked for him last year, whereas Daniel Riddle votes for the fish first rule as does American Joe Thompson: "Be on the river at first light," says Joe. His fellow American John Fields gives perhaps the best guidance for a potential Macnabber: "There is no substitute for great coaching."

So take our advice, grab your Hunter Balmoral gumboots and head for the hills. ■

<p><b>THE REAL MACNAB</b> A salmon on the fly and a stag, as the trio did in John Buchan's <i>John Macnab</i>. They must be "poached" in legal sporting manner from an owner who accepts the challenge.</p>	<p><b>THE SOUTHERN MACNAB</b> A couple of snipe, a sea-trout and a roe buck.</p>	<p><b>THE MACSCANDI</b> A moose, a brace of willow grouse and a salmon within 24 hours.</p>	<p><b>THE MACCHARLIE</b> Riding to foxhounds, the harriers and staghounds.</p>
<p><b>THE CLASSIC MACNAB</b> A stag, a salmon and a brace of grouse. This Macnab epitomises the best of country sports in the Highlands.</p>	<p><b>THE MACMARSH</b> A foreshore goose, a pike and a fallow buck.</p>	<p><b>THE MACARGENTINIAN</b> A golden dorado, 100 brace of doves and a wild pig. This is the northern Argentinian Macnab.</p>	<p><b>THE CORINTHIAN MACNAB</b> Riding to hounds in the morning, shooting a brace of partridges in the afternoon, and then catching a trout on the fly.</p>
<p><b>THE MACVERMIN</b> An impressive* rat, a chalkstream pike and a brace of magpies in the bag.</p>	<p><b>THE MACAFRICAN</b> A brace of sandgrouse, impala and a tigerfish in one day.</p>	<p>■ All Macnabs are to be taken within 24 hours.</p>	

\*JUDGES WILL DECIDE WHAT CONSTITUTES "IMPRESSIVE"