

THIS year *The Field's* Macnab, held for the first time in association with Glenfarclas Whisky, Hine Cognac and Champagne Pol Roger, was the most successful in its five-year existence. Seventeen Macnabbers claimed success on hill and moor and river. As ever, the Gannochy estate in the Angus Glens provided a large part of the bag with seven Macnabs. Tulchan Lodge played host to another four. Most stuck to the classic interpretation but one Corinthian version made it, too.

Gannochy's owner, Allan Hemmings, has created a cornucopia of sporting bliss in Glen Esk, alongside his team: David Clement, Colin Lanyon and Sam Wordingham. His son, Dean, chalked another Macnab on to the Gannochy board on 13 August after an abortive start the previous day. "I started my Macnab on the 12th," says Hemmings Junior, who managed the salmon and a brace of grouse before inadvertently shooting a pheasant. "Once that happened the game was up. I was fined and then punished by not being allowed to go for the stag," he laughs, "which made me particularly determined to get a Macnab the following day." He did just that, accompanied by apprentice keeper Sam Wordingham. "It was the first time Sam's rifle had been used for a Macnab, which was great," he says.

A newcomer to Gannochy's hall of fame, Stuart Waring, had a ducking as he fell into the water while returning his 6lb hen salmon. "But I did have the first part of my Macnab," he points out. With dry clothes on, a brace of grouse was taken over Peter Bond's English setter. It was Waring's first stalk and an impressive Imperial fell to his bullet. "The heart had a bullet hole through the middle. 'Beginner's luck,' said Allan Hemmings. 'Probably right,' I thought," Waring says.

Gannochy Macnabbers: Dean Hemmings on home ground (below); Joe Thompson (right)



A bagful of Macnabbers

What could be more sporting than a crack at a Macnab and what more satisfying than success, asks **Alexandra Henton**



Another Gannochy estate success, this time for Stuart Waring (above right with his grouse)

Joe Thompson and Stuart Hudson both revisited their Macnab success at Gannochy this year, as did Will Appleby. "I had no expectations of a repeat of last year, not on the first day of the week again," Appleby says. But after landing a salmon while fishing a little spot in the Gorge, he set off up the hill with Allan Hemmings' blessing. "There is a small moor at Gannochy, Allan's private hill, but David [Clement, headstalker] and I decided to enact the true spirit of the Macnab and do a spot of poaching. The hill duly provided the brace of grouse and a lone 10-year-old stag, a fitting culmination. As always, it is a team effort with David, Colin and Sam," Appleby says.

Tom Festing's Macnab was a case of third time lucky, after two close misses last year. "I had a score to settle," he says. But a repeat of last year, with Appleby bagging his Macnab on the first day of the week, made Festing twitchy.

"I was thinking, 'Oh no, not again, please.' Jealousy is a terrible thing. I was up at the crack of dawn every morning regardless of conditions, and I failed every morning," he recalls. A day on the moor on Thursday resulted in a fluky right-and-left. The game was on. By 3pm a fish was hooked and a nerve-racking stalk ensued. "A Royal presented himself but was deemed too good to shoot but by 5.55pm I was in place for a shot. The beast was 200yd away, weighed 83kg and was a 10-pointer." It rendered Festing speechless. "I had been thinking about the Macnab for a whole year. And who says you need to catch the fish first?"

The middle North Esk was at perfect fishing height when Alex Novell arrived at Gannochy in mid October. "The river had risen 10ft in a couple of hours on the previous Tuesday, leaving Allan Hemmings stranded in a tree on an island," says Novell. "My eighth Esk salmon of the week, a 6lb hen, came >



Above: Tom Festing and Will Appleby (front left and right) celebrate with Gannochy staff. Right: Alex Novell succeeded in mid October



soon after 10am on Wednesday to the Gannochy fly." Novell was a novice at grouse and had never taken a stag but some robust advice from Lanyon saw the brace of grouse bagged. "The stag was a perfect animal to cull, 10 years old with an unbalanced 10-point head, missing one bay tine and with a cup on one side and a fork on the other," he says.

Lucie Boedts is passionate about Macnabbing. "I arranged three days at

Tulchan Lodge in August to do my own. My friends were intrigued and wanted to try as well," she says. The estate in Perthshire created not just one but four Macnabbers, one of whom had a double.

Vincent Lebrun, from Belgium, took a double Macnab (two salmon, two stags and two brace of grouse) in five hours on 12 August. "Hunting is my second job," he claims. "Bad weather decided that we would leave the

salmon until last, so we headed to the hill at 7.20am and, while going up, saw two young stags." Approaching quickly Lebrun shot the first. "Bill [Mearns, headstalker] said, 'Shoot the other one,' so I did." Lebrun jokingly suggested trying for a double brace of grouse. "We

Vincent Lebrun (below left) scored a double at Tulchan Lodge, where Lucie Boedts (below) took up the challenge the following day



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had time in hand as the stag had been shot early," he says, "and by 8.45am I had shot four grouse." What a thrilling start to the day.

The first salmon was taken on the Shee by 12.15pm. A reviving gin and tonic at lunch-time and then another try at the river landed

Below: Maxime de Thomaz achieved a Macnab on 13 August. Juliette Trivier (below right) was Tulchan Lodge's final Macnabber in September



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Dalnacardoch saw a brace of Macnabs, old friends John McGrory (left) and John Robinson (above) nabbing them within a day of each other

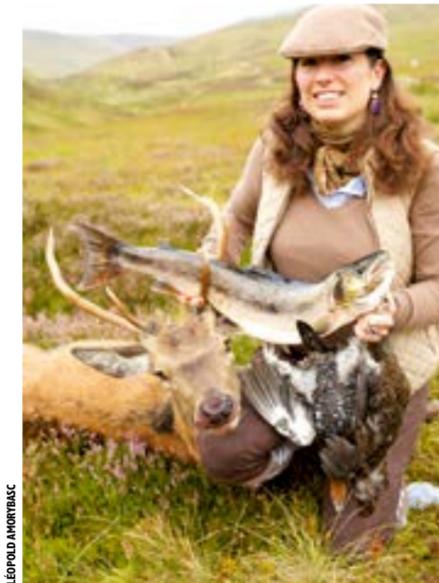
the second salmon by 2.25pm. "It was a sort of happiness that is quite difficult to explain," says Lebrun. The less blessed can only try to imagine it.

The following day, Lucie Boedts and Maxime de Thomaz took up the challenge. "There are two deerstalking and grouse-moor beats, so we started at the same time in the morning," explains Boedts. "Maxime had done by the middle of the day but I struggled

a little longer and got my salmon by 6pm, just in time for dinner." The quartet was completed by Juliette Trivier, who took the final Tulchan Macnab at the beginning of September.

Another Perthshire estate was responsible for a brace of Macnabs. "I've been coming to Dalnacardoch for nearly 15 years," says John McGrory, who, at 75, is our oldest Macnabber to date. However, he crawled nearly half a mile on the stalk. "It was pretty serious," he says. "I've been trying for a few years and after a salmon from the Tilt and the stalk I shot a pair of grouse, both on the wing." McGrory had invited John Robinson, a former Marine and head coach of the England Commonwealth shooting team and an all-round crack shot, up for a few days and the day after McGrory's triumph, Robinson got his own. "It was my first time salmon fishing," says Robinson, "and after a 7am start I landed a cock salmon at 10.10am on beat four of the Tilt." A trip to the far end of the estate, a quick stalk and within 10 minutes the grouse was secured. Macnab done. "I coached John [McGrory] to shoot grouse going away for his Macnab, so was pleased he did it, too," he says.

Two years ago Pelle Forss from Sweden bagged his Macnab on the Glenprosen estate. This year it was the turn of his son, Jonathan. "The first half of the day was spoiled due to a thick and sudden fog," says Jonathan >



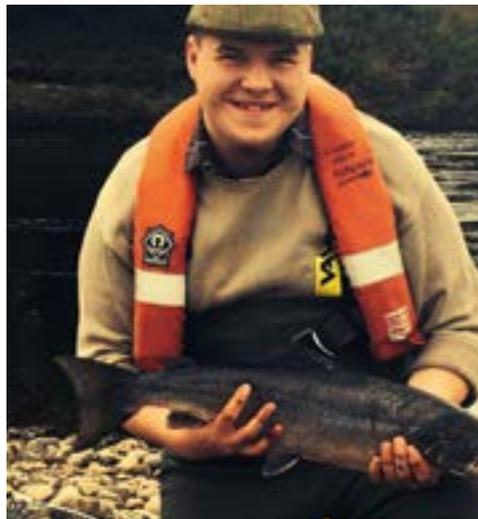
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Peter Tupper's attempt was a gift from his wife

Caithness. "There is no real grouse moor, two small rivers but lots of deer," he says. "My mother-in-law had bet me £10 I wouldn't catch a salmon, so there was extra pressure." By the second day the salmon was still elusive. "I had another exciting stalk. After I'd shot the stag the keeper told me to get back to the river, as the temperature had dropped. I didn't take a landing net so as not to jinx myself. But then a miracle – a fish on the line." And 50,000 acres from which to find a brace of wild grouse. "I shot one grouse and then at 5.45pm one other single grouse was put up and I shot it. It was a Macnab, by the skin of my teeth. So much luck is involved, especially when the grouse are so few, but it was utterly amazing."

Below, left to right: Corinthian Macnabber Andrew Sims; Jonathan Forss following in his father's footsteps; and Bill Dent with his grouse



“ After hunting with the Puckeridge he changed from breeches and boots to breeks and gumboots ”

Forss. "But a report from a group who had brought a stag down led us to a suitable group." A good shot was pushed out to quite a distance as a group of hinds caught wind. "But my aim didn't disappoint as the stag fell to the ground." Forss's shotgun skills were a little rusty but two birds were added to the bag from the same spot. "We headed to the Kerkock Fishings and I was lucky enough to catch a 7lb salmon on my third cast," he says.

"I read too much John Buchan," laughs Andrew Sims, who undertook the Corinthian Macnab: riding to hounds, a brace of partridges and a trout on the fly. "I saw the different types of Macnab and it was the opportunity to have some fun." Sims hadn't hunted for 20 years but boarded a hireling for autumn hunting with the Puckeridge. "It was a really full

day's challenge and great fun," he says. After changing from breeches and boots to breeks and gumboots in a field, a couple of drives as back gun on the Pampisford estate shoot secured him his partridges. "I fluffed the first shot, my first shot of the season. Realising that I wouldn't have many more chances, I re-focused and was relieved to find that I connected with two birds from the second covey that got up." A quick lunch and on to the Pampisford estate's stretch of the Granta. "I had a bite but the little brown trout slipped away as I struck the line. A switch to a smaller pattern did the trick and within another 30 minutes I'd managed to bag a lovely 1½lb trout under an overhanging alder," he says.

A 30th wedding anniversary present from his wife took Peter Tupper to Langwell in

Bill Dent also took his stag first, at 10.45am on the Ben Starav flats in Glen Etive. "Not the highest stalk but no less exciting for that, and it was a beast that was high on the wanted list, a long way off and I did get very wet," he says. "Success at last – 27 years after I first flicked a fly on the Etive. A red hen, 6lb, taken on a Stoa's Tail in a sudden squally shower and returned." Up to the moor by 2.30pm and a decent walk resulted in the brace of grouse.

From fishing virgin to stalking novice, each Macnab is unique and the thrill of the sport, the excitement of the contest and the combination of luck and skill involved conspire to make *The Field's* Macnab Challenge, in association with the Glenfarclas Whisky, Hine Cognac and Champagne Pol Roger, the finest in its field. ■