

Three of the best

All hail the 2013 Macnabbers. **Alexandra Henton** meets the talented (and lucky) few who bagged a stag, salmon and brace of grouse in a day



THE *Field* and Hunter's Macnab Challenge always attracts an international coterie of sporting types. The 2013 roll-call includes a pair of athletic Americans, a clutch of second-timers, new entries from Great Britain, Poland and Sweden, and a brace of virgins: Macnabbers

who have never before bagged any component – a brace of grouse, a stag or a salmon. The Gannochy estate presented a leash of the Macnabs and Glenprosen a brace.

Keith Trenter was the only Macnabber to complete the challenge in August, at Gannochy. "This was my second Macnab. The first was special, the second was very special,"

Above: Macnabber Lawrence Brennan (centre) with gillie/ponyman Dave Cartwright (left) and headstalker Ian Stewart (right) at Braeroy estate

he says. "It was great to catch a 12lb salmon in low water and a walk on the moor culminated in a right-and-left." David Clement, the head-keeper, suggested he try for a stag. "After >



Main picture (from left): Gannochy owner Allan Hemmings with Bill Mayfield, John Field Jr and headkeeper David Clement. Mayfield in pursuit and celebrating (above); Keith Trenter (far left); and Thomas Ohlsson (left)

walking, crawling, sliding and moving position three times a 12-pointer lay at our feet, shot clean through the heart. It was an amazing day. I felt like I had won the Lottery."

American Bill Mayfield was on his fifth visit to Gannochy with previous Macnabbers Joe Thompson (three times) and John Fields Jr (twice) when his luck turned. "Two years ago I tried for the Macnab but botched the stag," he recalls. "With the low water I had fished every day without luck until I decided to try the riffle hatch. Friday morning I fished Rock Pool and caught a grilse."

The game was on. Gannochy's owner, Allan Hemmings, lent Mayfield his .270 and after the obligatory practice shot they headed to the moor, but the stag had disappeared. An eight-pointer at 4.30pm was followed by some testing grouse. "Suddenly a bird got up about 35yd-40yd away and I took the shot, to howls of disappointment - it was blackgame. I knew Allan was miffed but he was good about it. I got a red grouse at 6.30pm and a final shot at 6.45pm completed the Macnab. We finished with a bottle of Balvenie, listening to the piper against the backdrop of the moors. A glorious day."



Success all round: Adam Calvert (top) at Garynahine; Ruairidh Cooper (above) at Finzean; and Will Appleby (right) at Gannochy

"I am a keen fisherman but the long, hot summer had already resulted in two salmon trips being cancelled," says Will Appleby, the third Gannochy Macnabber. "But reports on how wonderful the North Esk was to fish, and how surrounding moors were strewn with grouse and red deer, were encouraging." The Witch's Pool produced the first salmon of the season, a 10lb cock that had survived a seal's attempt to remove its tail. "Allan had told me



how his daughter had managed her Macnab after landing a fish at midday, and the penny dropped." There was trepidation as he headed to the moor as Appleby had never shot grouse. "I remembered the technique for rough woodcock-shooting that I enjoy in Dorset," he says. The brace was bagged by 2.30pm.

The stag was a team effort. "Everyone at Gannochy works together when it comes to the hill. Mel, my fiancée, and I stood at the

bottom with David, Colin and Sam, waiting for a break in the drizzle and a chance to spot the right stag," he says. A lengthy stalk and a 300ft climb proved unsuccessful, by which time the clock had passed five. "David uttered those fateful words, 'Will, I'm afraid we're snookered.' But then we saw four stags walking towards us 500yd away and finally a beast was brought down. It was the same stag we had started off stalking four hours before," he says. "My first Macnab will live with me forever, and the week produced another first: Mel landed her first salmon."

Ruairidh Cooper bought a Macnab attempt donated by Finzean estate in Aberdeenshire at the GWCT Grampian Region auction. "My first successful attempt was at Balavil estate in 2010. This time it was a textbook affair," he says. "I met headkeeper Hedge Shand at first light and the stag was shot by 10.30. We then headed to Peter's Hill for the grouse and I bagged a brace from the same covey by 12.30." On a roll and to the Dee, where low water made for difficult conditions. "I had been told a Red Francis fly fished fairly square was the best chance of success but by 5pm I was fishing Suicide, the last of the five pools." About

halfway down Cooper had an aggressive take followed by a strong run and, 20 minutes later, Shand netted a fine 16-pounder. "My second success in three attempts," he says.

Lawrence Brennan's Macnab was a novelty. "The trip was a 40th birthday present

“ Screeching to a halt the covey was spotted, gun raised and two birds brought down ”

from my wife," he says. "I beagled at school and have done a lot of trout-fishing but wanted to try a Macnab. I headed to Braeroy having never shot a grouse, caught a salmon or shot a stag before," he reveals. Like Cooper, he got his stag first, after four hours on the hill. "The nine-point trophy is now hanging on my wall in Battersea," he says. After missing the first three grouse, the brace was shot. On to the river and a 3lb grilse was landed at 5.30pm. "It was a relief," he says. "We celebrated with a dram in the bothy and I was told someone

had been trying unsuccessfully for a Macnab there for 30 years. I was very lucky."

Adam Calvert nabbed a virgin Macnab at Garynahine on the Isle of Lewis. "I've tried for salmon and stag before but been unlucky," he says. "This time I caught two salmon in the morning. The gillie realised I was shooting a stag later that day and said, 'Let's see if we can do the grouse, too.'" Once the necessary troops had been rallied, the grouse were duly shot. "Although the second I had to retrieve - it fell into a stream and the pointer was afraid of the water." The forestry stag was taken quite late - at 6.30pm - and the hat trick completed.

Significant birthdays seem a propitious time to attempt a Macnab. Peter Glenser's successful attempt at Amhuinnnsuidhe Castle was also a gift from his wife. Although Norfolk (Glenser's home county) doesn't provide much practice for a salmon fisherman or hill stalker, a 3¼lb cock grilse was landed at 10.46am and the hill was taken on at a slow and steady pace. A nerve-racking miss with the first shot was followed by a clean kill and a trek back to the bottom of the hill, exhausted, by 6pm, ready for a brace of grouse. "We tramped on around Lochan an Fheoir. My ➤



Jonathan Blumb (left) at Glenprosen, Peter Glenser (top centre) at Amhuinnsuidhe and Witold Danilowicz (above) at East Haugh

boots felt heavier and heavier and the sun set just after eight," recalls Glenser. Heading back to the castle, a grouse flew in front of the Land Rover. Screeching to a halt the covey was spotted, gun raised to shoulder and two birds brought down leaving an elated Macnabber.

The Field inspired Witold Danilowicz to try for a Macnab. "I am a subscriber and shoot and stalk in Poland and elsewhere but don't really fish, but I read about the Macnab Challenge and wanted to do it," he says. He headed to the East Haugh House Hotel and spent a day practising with the fly. "We started with the stag very early and on the same walk

got the brace of grouse," he says. "We ate the grouse the following evening at the hotel." A quick rest and on to the river. "I spent the rest of the day on the river and caught a 14lb salmon. I wanted to take a bite out of it," he laughs. "I was exhausted after the previous day on the river and had given up hope by mid-afternoon. It was amazing and thrilling."

Last year's successful Macnabber from Sweden, Pelle Forss, encouraged Thomas Ohlsson to make the attempt at Glenprosen. "We met on a boar-shoot in Poland," says Ohlsson. "Then, back in Sweden, Pelle suggested I join him on his trip to Glenprosen this year to try for a Macnab." It was a long day. A 5lb grilse was secure by 10am but it was 7pm before the stag was brought down. "On the way back down I shot the grouse with about 20 minutes of daylight left." Celebrations were enlivened by gin and tonic.

American Jonathan Blumb had visited Glenprosen six times before and was booked in for a week's stalking when headkeeper Bruce Cooper suggested a Macnab attempt. "It appealed to me as a fun day," he says. Using the Kynloch Killer lure he

landed a 12lb salmon at Kercock Fishings on the Tay. The stag fell immediately. "I used a Ruger M77 Hawkeye rifle and a Barnes TSX 180-grain bullet put the stag down," he says. After the gralloch it was only 3pm but the weather had turned dark and overcast. "Some coveys of grouse flushed wildly out of range. Other coveys flushed at the edge of my range but because of the light it was extremely difficult to pick them out before they disappeared below the horizon." But the grouse were finally shot by 4.48pm and a memorable day completed.

The Macnab is a sporting pinnacle. Impossible to guarantee, it requires equal dollops of luck and skill, and the sporting gods to smile. All hail *The Field* and Hunter Macnab Challengers for 2013. They join the other lucky few in the fieldsports firmament. ■

MACALMOST

Theo Elton (right) netted a salmon at 8.20am on the Lower Shin in Sutherland, a ptarmigan at 1pm on the top of Alladale and two sika stags at 6.30pm. A sterling effort, worthy of a mention.



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