

SCOTTISH SPORT

# *Highland Fling*

A team of ladies enjoyed the chance to achieve a Macnab, and **Peter Glenser** was there to savour the experience.

Photography: **Leopold Amory**

A photograph showing two individuals from behind, sitting on a grassy hillside. They are wearing traditional Scottish kilts and hats. The person on the right is holding a camera up to their eye, taking a picture. They are looking out over a vast, green valley with a winding river and distant hills under a clear sky.

Ghislaine Golsong takes a shot  
in the most stunning scenery.



**J**ust occasionally, Lady Luck makes sure one is in the right place at the right time. It might be the best pool at the perfect time, it might be the hot peg on a day's driven shooting, or it might be the fabulous stag in the ideal spot as the mist clears. For me, it was a chance encounter.

Having been lucky enough to achieve my own long sought after Macnab at Amhuinnsuidhe on the Isle of Harris a year last February, I was invited to a reception at the Flyfishers' Club in London by the estate. Whilst talking to a number of like-minded individuals, I was introduced to Lucie Boedts-Kuehnle. Lucie, along with husband Florian, owns the Tulchan Estate in Glenisla, Angus (not to be confused with Tulchan in Speyside). Lucie is hugely passionate about all aspects of field sports and is a fantastic ambassador for them. She is especially keen to promote the sustainable, healthy nature of the food that fishing, stalking and shooting produce. Not only is she a successful corporate lawyer, she is also a keen amateur taxidermist. She believes every part of an animal should be used. She is also enthusiastic about introducing more women to field sports, especially those who have never tried any before.

Would I, she wondered, like to visit Tulchan during her annual Ladies Macnab Challenge? It wasn't a

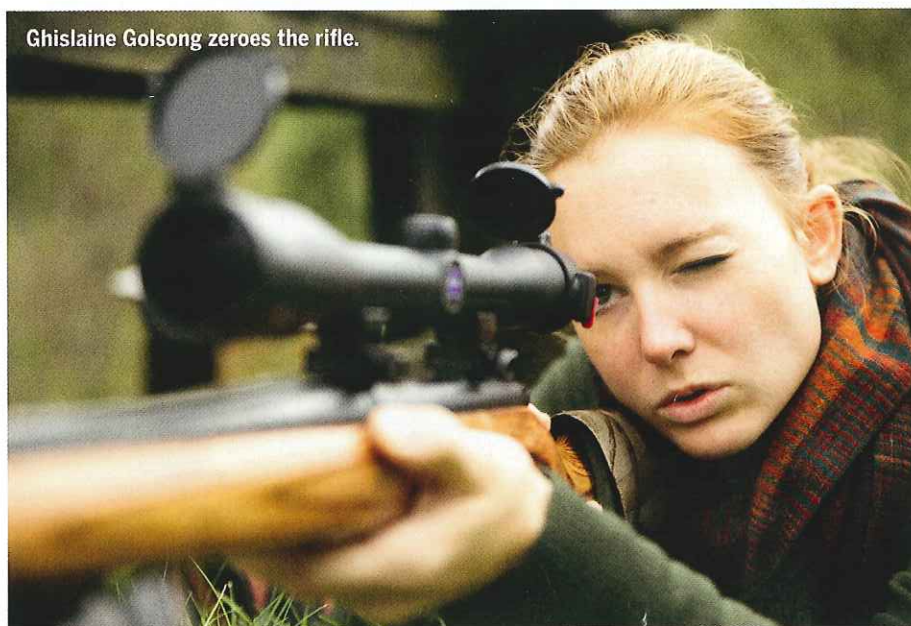
particularly tough question to answer, and so it was that I found myself driving up to Tulchan Lodge early last September. Despite leaving early in the morning, it was dark as I entered the remote glen road. We ate a welcome supper in Tulchan's elegant dining room and knowing the following day's activities might be strenuous, I avoided the dangers of "first night fever" by remaining disciplined with the after-dinner whisky.

### The field of play

Tulchan is an estate of around 15,000 acres in the heart of the Grampian Mountains, marching with Invercauld, Airlie Estate and Balmoral. It is principally a deer forest with the prime stalking ground known as Caenlochan, and is astonishingly beautiful. While it feels remote it is in fact less than two hours from Edinburgh. The highest hill is the 3,504ft Glas Maol, from which the views are truly spectacular. Whilst there are no salmon systems on the estate itself there is an arrangement with nearby Dalnaglar castle for guests to fish the water there under the tutelage of Dougy Morison.

The estate is divided into two beats, East and West, which allows two rifles on the hill per day. It's fair to say we all had high hopes of 'Macnabbing'; one of Lucie's guests had tried for one on August 12 while another, Vincent le ➤

Ghislaine Golsong zeroes the rifle.





Brun, managed the incredible feat of achieving a double Macnab in just five hours. The luck at Tulchan hadn't quite run out though, because two further Macnabs were achieved the following day, one by Lucie herself and one by another of her guests.

Well, with all that happening only a couple of weeks before my arrival, excitement was running at fever pitch. The first of Lucie's guests to go to the hill was Juliette Trivier, and the rest of us watched enviously as she set off immediately after breakfast with Bill, wondering what the day would have in store.

"As we headed to the stags we saw good numbers of grouse."

### Falcons and pointers

After an enjoyable but fruitless search for a roebuck, the rest of the morning was spent honing our skills on fast going-away clays to sharpen us up for the grouse. I hadn't thought I would

see grouse that day – but I was wrong. Lucie is a keen falconry enthusiast. She had arranged for Stewart Miller, founder and director of charity International Raptor Research and Conservation, to come to Tulchan with a pair of young peregrines and his young Braccos. Both the birds and the pointers were learning their craft and we were invited to go to the hill to watch them train on live quarry. It was a thrilling sight. Although the afternoon was unsuccessful it was certainly not for want of trying. Each pointer was sent forward in turn, ranged widely over the hill and found grouse. Unfortunately the grouse were jumpy and the dogs were unable to hold a point long enough to deploy the peregrines. Eventually the birds were given some exercise and allowed to stoop to lures. Stewart said he would try again the following day. I was hooked and immediately asked if I could accompany him.

Returning to the lodge, we discovered Juliette had achieved the stag and both grouse and had headed to the river. By the time we had changed for dinner she had returned. Success. She had caught a fine salmon and had achieved her Macnab. Needless to say there were celebrations late into the night.

### The morning after

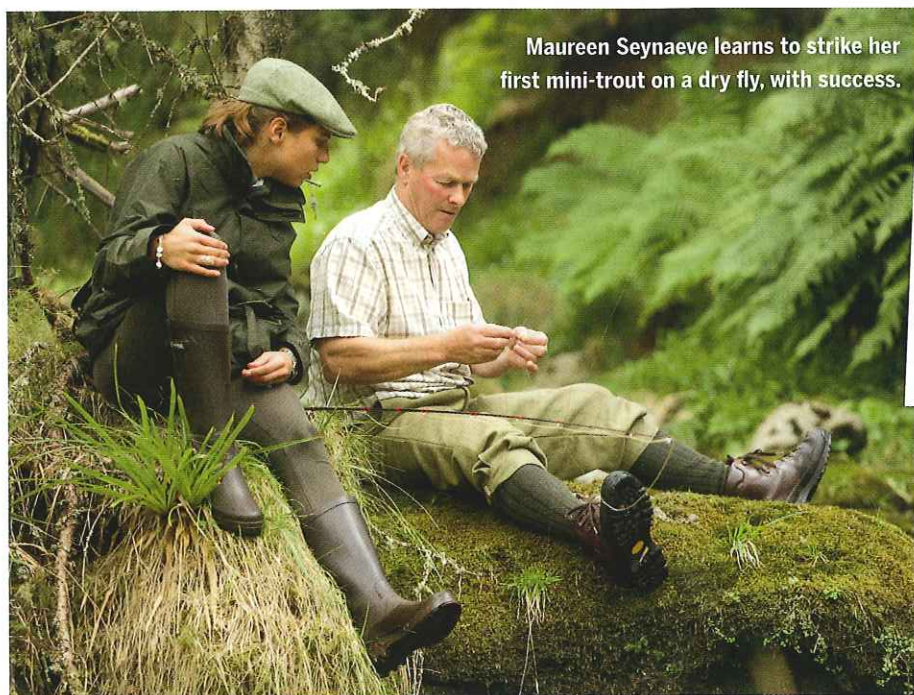
A pre-breakfast roebuck stalk had been arranged and was a success. After a short and midgey pursuit, a member of our party grassed a young roebuck, which was whisked back to the kitchen where parts of the beast became the centrepiece of a proper stalker's breakfast.

Suitably sustained, Ghislaine Golsong headed for the hill beat with David the understalker. Ghislaine, an experienced shot and stalker, managed to shoot her first red stag, was successful on grouse but was defeated by the salmon in difficult conditions. Maureen Seynaeve also headed for the hill on Tuesday but fared less well. She had opted to start with the stag but had trouble finding a suitable beast. After drawing a blank on the deer there was little time left for



Bëa Johnson & Ghislaine Golsong go in search of grouse.





Maureen Seynaeve learns to strike her first mini-trout on a dry fly, with success.

a thorough search for grouse that also proved elusive.

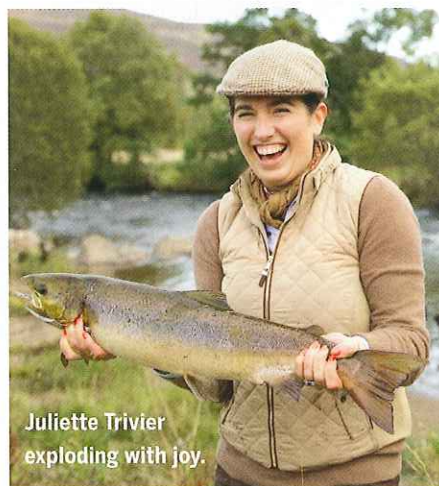
Tuesday also saw the arrival of Béa Johnson, a broadcaster, blogger and author of *Zero Waste Home*. Béa was born in France but now lives in the US. Although she had not shot live quarry before she had used a shotgun and was soon off to the range for some instruction with the rifle. She was not the only author present; one of the other guests was Martine Fallon, a Belgian food writer and cook who enthusiastically accompanied others for some early morning roe buck stalking. Béa went onto the hill the following day and although a grouse and a stag were shot, time pressure was against the participants and neither achieved a Macnab.

### A pessimistic fisherman

But it wasn't just the ladies who were trying their luck on this visit. Soon it was my turn and I set off with high hopes. My inexperience on fish coupled with my belief that they are always the most difficult element of the enterprise led me to persuade Dougy we should start on the salmon. I crept out early – with only photographer Leopold Amory and Frederick's friend Bjorn Kilian to accompany me. We arrived at the river shortly after first light, Dougy waiting with a particularly salmon-tempting

fly on the end of the line. We quietly crept to the river, for fear of scaring the fish while I was given a quick refresher course in casting. Stealth was the order of the day. Unusually I managed not to put the fly into a tree, sheep or companion too many times.

We covered two pools. The odd splash of salmon could be seen but none were tempted to take my fly so Dougy proposed that we implement Plan B immediately: to drive to another location. A shortish drive was followed by our arrival at the new river. The odd salmon popped up to have a look at what was going on. I threw the fly towards said fish's location. They studiously avoided said fly. Doubtless bored with my incompetence, Bjorn and Leopold had



Juliette Trivier exploding with joy.



Dougy Morrison's dogs.

an early morning snooze by the riverside.

### The hill beckons

Eventually the clock said it was nudging 8am and it was time to go back to Tulchan for breakfast and to head for the hill. David was waiting. As we headed towards the stags we saw good numbers of grouse. I proposed we walk up a part of the moor on the way to see if the bird element of the challenge could be achieved early. We got out of the Land Rover and quickly put up a covey. I managed to shoot one but then missed another. Still, one grouse in the bag and it was barely 9am. What could possibly go wrong?

We pressed on for a while. It was a little misty but nothing to worry about. We eventually abandoned the Land Rover and set off on foot. The air was thin but the going not too steep – quite a relief. Time seemed to pass by quickly. Plainly taking one rifle and some observers along is testing for any stalker but David took it in his stride. By noon we had cautiously crept into a likely spot. David went forward for a spy. He was soon back. Unseen by us, we were near the crest of a steep hill. At the top under the lee of some rocks was a group of deer including a stag.

We inched forward under his direction and reached the summit. The stag was exactly where David had said it would be. I thought the slope beneath it would have given a chamois vertigo. I crawled forward, eased the safety of the rifle and took the shot. ➤



I knew in an instant the bullet had found the stag. It took a while to get down to the beast. The stag was a reasonable 10-pointer and absolutely right to take. After David had gralloched him and explained that the Argo would pick up the carcass a little later, I followed his gaze up the hill. It had looked steep before but from the bottom it looked vertical. I chose to draw a veil over the gruelling upward trek. But the dram that was taken to calm my beating heart at the top was as fulfilling as it was medicinal. An hour or so later we were back at the Land Rover.

### Not as easy as it sounds

On our way back to the lodge I was confident we would be able to get grouse number two. But it proved to be rather elusive. We saw plenty and stopped and arranged impromptu walked-up grouse sessions. Sometimes quite large coveys would get up. Occasionally these coveys would pass by in easy range unscathed. Form had deserted me in no small measure.

At one point I even managed to swing at a covey that had got up just in front of me. I became increasingly frustrated until we found ourselves back at the lodge. One grouse and one stag didn't seem a good place to call it quits, though.

David wondered if we should go back to the top of the hill and have another go. Back up we went. We stopped from time to time to explore grouse looking places. I stumbled, wheezed and fell into deep, cold, wet holes in the moor. Eventually we saw a grouse-shaped head above the heather. Then another. And another. I moved towards the track. As quietly as I could

**"We changed flies, then pools: I nearly managed to lasso a fish with a loop in my line."**

I closed the distance between us. At about 30 yards they all got up and flew. I swung instinctively, fired and saw my bird fall. A swift retrieve by David's dog and grouse number two was in the bag. Time for a dram all round and then back to Tulchan.

It was nearly 6pm by the time I returned but Dougy was waiting. We returned to Dalnaglar and were near the water an hour later. The pressure was seriously on now – just the fish to go.

We crept to the first pool. As we approached I saw a salmon jump. Things were looking good. I cast. I retrieved. More fish jumped. And more. It seemed as if the pool was stiff with salmon. None were inclined to have a go at my fly. We changed flies. We changed pools. I nearly managed to lasso one fish with a loop in my line. But not quite – and it wouldn't have counted anyway. The light was fading now. Again we changed pools but I realised shortly after 9pm that this Macnab was not to be. Reluctantly we drew stumps and admitted defeat.



Succulent roast partridge served in the elegant dining room.