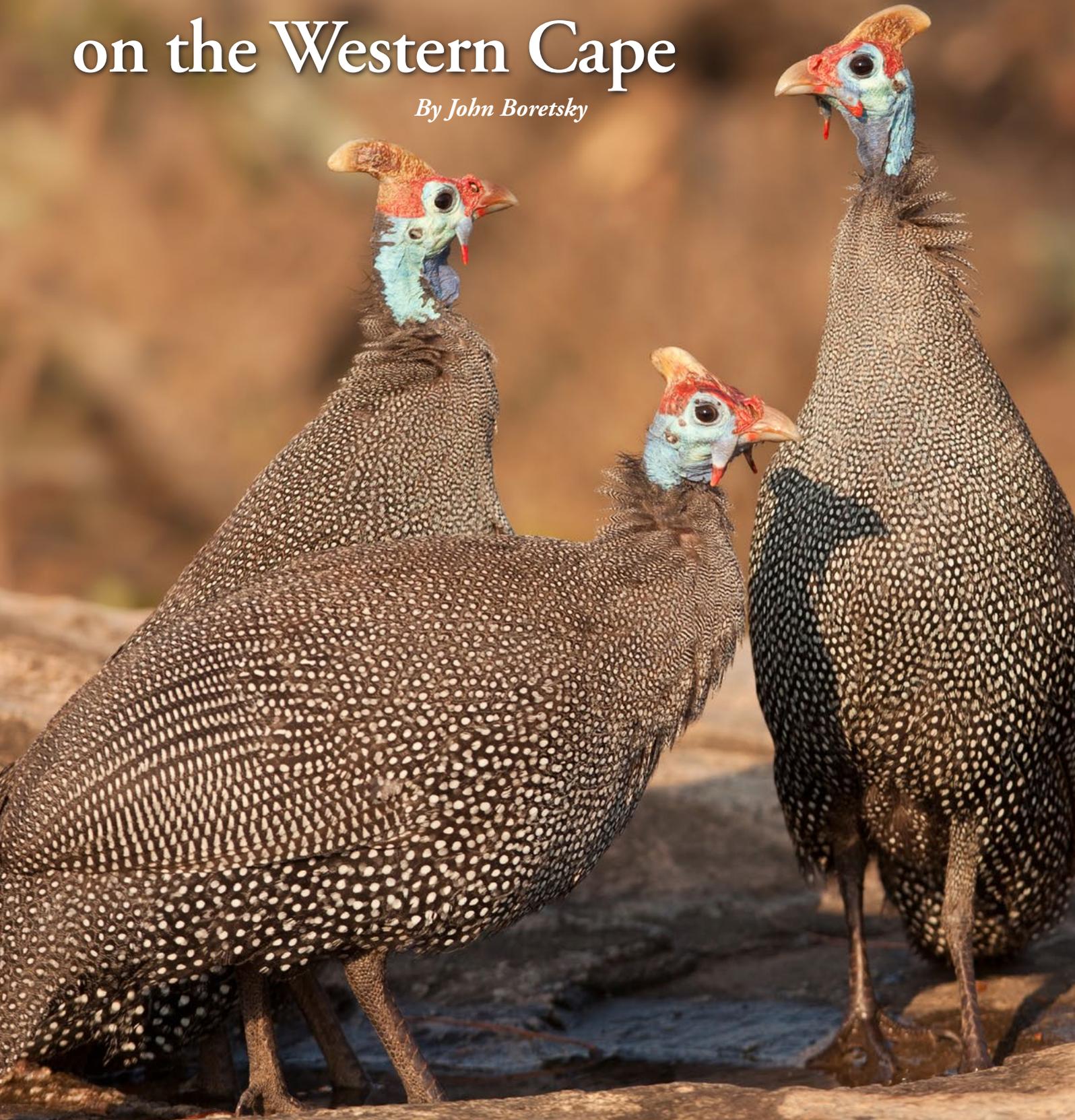


An African Macnab on the Western Cape

By John Boretsky



Squawking and beating the air into submission, the guineafowl burst out of a row of grapevines not eight yards in front of me. I swung the Beretta 686, firing first one barrel, then the other.

My PH Joe, our tracker Jacob, and I stared in disbelief as the bird flew over an irrigation ditch and the row of trees beyond. I swear I heard the Red Gods of the Hunt snicker. But I'm a little ahead of the story.

Named after the Scottish poacher made famous in a John Buchan novel, a "Macnab" is traditionally a red stag, a brace of grouse, and a salmon caught with a fly rod, taken in the Scottish highlands, all in the same day. The concept first intrigued me, then fascinated me, then became an obsession. Although "Bonnie Scotland" was not in any plans of mine, immediate or otherwise, I began looking for opportunities that would come close. So I contacted some old friends, Joe and Nicole Da Silva of Cape Town Hunting Safaris, to see if they could help me.

Of course they knew what a Macnab was. One e-mail and the deal was sealed. My African Macnab was to be a springbok ram, a brace of guineafowl, and a largemouth bass, all in one day. That sounded great to me.

A beautiful, clear Western Cape morning found me sighting in Joe's .300 Win. Mag. Two shots were enough to convince me that if I missed, it wouldn't be the rifle's fault.

As we climbed into Joe's *bakkie*, or pickup truck, Nicole made an ultimatum: "Come back with your Macnab and we'll grill steaks to celebrate. Come back without it, and you'll go hungry." Joe assured me that she wasn't kidding.

Then it was off to Bontebok Ridge, a wheat farm and vineyard with a large reservoir that Joe had permission to hunt and fish. There was a good-sized herd of springbok on the farm, so we decided that the first order of business would be the "beast," and set out to find them.

We found them all right, in a miserably flat area of several hundred acres, with no cover – a herd of some 40 antelope standing



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in the middle, in the open, with 40 pairs of eyes, watching. Pulling the truck into a slight depression and crouching low, we followed the depression on foot, coming out where Joe thought we'd have a shot. The springbok were not spooked, but were restless and had grazed their way well past us. We dropped back into the swale and ran back to the bakkie.

Circling around we found another wrinkle in the face of the meadow and made another stalk. Whether they'd seen us, winded us, or heard us didn't matter. They had quit grazing and were quickly walking away from us. There was no shot to be had. Once again crouching low, we ran back to the truck. I'm not as fit as I should be, probably never was, and the running was beginning to tell on me. Some folks just don't "hurry up" well.

We then made an even wider sweep to try to get more in front of them. Again hurrying on foot, we moved in a series of shallow depressions that ran parallel to the herd's line of march. We peeked up over the edge of the last low area and there they were, not 80 yards in front of us. They had slowed and had begun to graze again.

Joe glassed and Jacob set up the shooting sticks. I was panting heavily by this time, but managed to place the rifle and look through the scope as Joe whispered, "The third ram from the left," then, "Shoot quickly, they're beginning to move."

I squeezed the trigger and heard the thump of the bullet hitting. Suddenly Joe was slapping my back. My ram was down. At least the "beast" portion of my Macnab was in place. I didn't stop grinning all the way to the man-made lake. I could feel the hunting gods smiling down on me. If I'd only known...

It was time to try for a fish. Joe got out a spinning rod. Now, I don't count myself as an accomplished angler. In fact, much of my experience has been with a bobber and a worm. It had been years since I'd tried to cast with a spinning rod. Normally my luck when fishing is pretty well summed up with one strike followed by casting and reeling the rest of the day as the fish hide in the weeds and laugh.

My first cast was not only pitiful, but the Mepps landed right in the middle of a stand of reeds, without even hitting the water. It took me nearly five minutes to get the lure free and recovered. The next cast was a little better and, beginning to feel more comfortable, I reeled in the line, not even thinking about what I was doing. That, of course, was when the fish struck. I didn't set the hook properly and the bass

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shook it free just as I was about to get it to the bank. Joe was disappointed, but I was not surprised.

I managed to make a pretty good cast into the same area. About halfway back, a bass struck again and this time I was ready. I set the hook and played him in, through the thick reedy area without losing him, past a sunken snag without letting him roll under it, to the lake's edge where Joe was waiting with a net.

I was two-thirds the way to my Macnab and a steak dinner. And it wasn't even ten in the morning yet! I had no idea how the Red Gods were setting me up...

When Jacob returned from taking the ram to the skinning shed, we drove to the vineyards. The day had been calm earlier, but a breeze had come up and threatened to get stronger. Joe took the 12-gauge out of its case and handed it to me along with a handful of shells. "I don't need that many," I said. "Just have to hit two birds and they're as big as a house." I pocketed the shells anyway, but missed the sounds of the gods giggling.

We could see guineafowl running down the rows, crossing into the next open area, then the next, but nothing flushed. I resisted the temptation to run after them and worked my way down a row. Two birds flushed. I fired two shots. Two birds flew away. I pushed all doubts aside, thinking, "Hell, I always miss the first ones."

Then three birds flushed on the next row, and three flew off, sent on their way with two parting shots. Hmmm. The day was getting hotter, the breeze a bit stronger.

Working the next field back and forth between the rows of grapevines, we found

plenty of guineafowl, always a little ahead of us, always another row over, always running, never flushing. We were almost to the end of the field when three birds rose, two to the right and one to the left in a perfect "number five, low house" skeet shot. Without thinking, I swung the Beretta through to the left, squeezed the trigger, and watched the bird crumple in mid flight. One down, one to go.

My Macnab was in the bag. Now, that wasn't the first time I've been wrong, but there have been very few times that I've been *that* wrong. I hadn't counted on the gods' cruel sense of humor.

I reloaded and we started back to the truck. And that brings us back to the bird at the beginning of my story. Certainly I couldn't miss any thing that close, that slow, and that big. Not with *two* barrels! But I had, and that set the theme for the rest of the morning. Five more flushes and 10 more rounds out of the 12-gauge, and I was still one bird short of a Macnab. The fabled gods must have been rolling on the floor with laughter by that time.

It was time for us to stop, regroup, and have lunch. The drive back to the lake and lunch was quiet. I didn't say a word, neither did Joe. The only sounds I heard were the distant peals of laughter.

The day got hotter, the wind stronger, but I was determined: Man against Olympus, the underdog against the Cosmos, me against the Red Gods – and the guineafowl.

Except this time there were no birds.

The vineyards that had been full of guineafowl that morning were devoid of anything flying larger than a dragonfly.

"My African Macnab was to be a springbok ram, a brace of guineafowl, and a largemouth bass, all in one day."



Boretsky confesses that he is not the world's most accomplished fisherman, and it took him several attempts at casting and setting the hook to land a largemouth bass.



For hunter John Boretsky (lying down) to complete an African Macnab in South Africa's Western Cape with PH Joe Da Silva (kneeling), the required Scottish red stag was replaced by a springbok ram.



The Scottish Macnab's "landing a salmon on a flying rod" was substituted in South Africa by reeling in a largemouth bass on a spinning rod – for Boretsky, easier said than done.



Actually, the hardest feat to accomplish in his African Macnab was bagging a brace of guinea fowl! "I hadn't counted on the hunting gods' cruel sense of humor," writes Boretsky.

That was when the third bird flushed, and with it the opportunity for redemption, not to mention a steak dinner. I took the guinea cleanly on the rise. Jacob was into the weeds after it before the wadding hit the ground, coming back with the bird, grinning. As for me, well, I was the picture of calm decorum, if calm decorum includes dancing around like a pass receiver in the end zone, shouting, "Yes! Yes!"

I had my Macnab.

Well, I've not faced a charging buffalo or downed a lion or elephant. And I've certainly not courted death in the long grass after a wounded leopard. But I beat the Red Gods and got my African Macnab, along with a wonderful steak dinner with old friends, plus a few Scotches thrown in, all in honor of friendship, the Western Cape and, of course, Mr. John Macnab.

John Boretsky, having hunted in North America, the UK and Africa, has proved to guides, outfitters, and PHs alike that he is a passable rifle shot, an off-and-on wingshooter, and an unquestionably inept angler. John works as SCI's liaison to the professional hunting industry.

We tramped through rows of vines, and drove from vineyard to vineyard. Nothing. We were fast approaching "the remains of the day."

I started wishing I'd eaten a bigger lunch because, if Nicole was as good as her word, and I knew she was, there wasn't going to be a steak dinner that night.

Suddenly, maybe 15 yards in front of us, three guinea fowl ran out toward an uncultivated tangle of weeds at the edge of the vineyard. It was all I could do to keep from ground shooting the last one and calling it done. When you're fighting the Cosmos, what's a little cheating, anyway? The birds made it to the weeds.

Jacob picked up a baseball-sized rock. I thought, "Oh no, not the 'old throw the rock in to flush 'em trick'. That never works." I started to wade into the weeds and Jacob stopped me, without a word. He pantomimed setting the gun to his shoulder, made sure I did it, then pointed at a bush, larger than the others. I nodded, and he threw the rock.

I expected nothing, so I wasn't really ready when two guinea fowl came straight up clucking loudly, then, gaining speed, flew off towards parts unknown. I just stared after them, not firing a shot. That old trick had actually worked, and I wasn't ready. Once more, I'd blown it. The gods had won.

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