

The Field's TOP SHOTS 2015

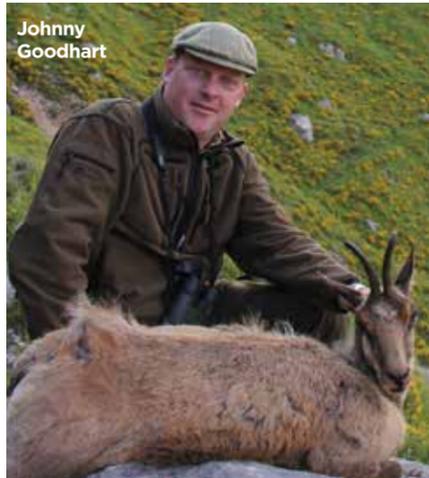
Compiled by **Jonathan Young**

As part of that unceasing struggle for perfection that distinguishes *The Field*, this year's Top Shots list attempts to place the laurel crown of immortality on those who shine in different firmaments. We have, therefore, divided the Fabled Fifty into five categories: grouse gurus; pheasant professors; all rounders; ladies (unquestionably); and the Young Bucks, by which we mean those yet to reach respectable middle age.

As ever, the FF have been selected using one harsh standard: are they truly and obviously outstanding? Our international jury has pondered long, interrogated hard and found the following make the ranks of the heaven born. ➤



GROUSE GURUS



Johnny Goodhart

the drive, *Memento mori* – “Remember [that you have to] die”, to remind him of his mortal status? No need; despite his accuracy, Burt remains as modest and kind as ever.

DAVID FLUX

While the trend is for increasingly heavy artillery, Norfolk-based Flux uses pairs of 28-bores and .410s to devastating effect on grouse, a living example of the maxim it's not the size that matters but where you put it.

FRANCIS FRANCO

Wildly enthusiastic with woodcock, Franco is a game-changer on grouse. Accuracy is no longer enough – accuracy with speed is now the standard after the Spaniard showed them what it means to be a quick-change artist. Brings his Spanish “cargador” who loads from a folding seat in the front of the butt.

JOHNNY GOODHART

A reluctant vote can count far more than gush, which is why we liked, “much to my displeasure, Goodhart still deserves inclusion, for all the tedious reasons of which you are aware.” Goodhart's consistency on grouse is matched only by the deeply unnatural tidiness of his Range Rover.

JEREMY HERRMANN

The owner of Muggleswick and East Allenheads remains a top grouse performer and pigeon-shot. His success with over-and-unders on late-season birds is such

NICK BAIKIE

A former grousekeeper – he came up through the ranks under the guidance of Jeremy Wearmouth at Gunnerside – Baikie now manages a significant portfolio of grouse moors. In his late thirties and fiercely fit, “he's right up there with the best,” according to one admirer, who cites his killing 38 late-October grouse with 45 shots last season using 32g No 6s from a pair of fully choked Churchills. Friends consider he has the natural hunting instincts of a Cherokee, giving rise to his nickname, Three Bears.

PHIL BURTT

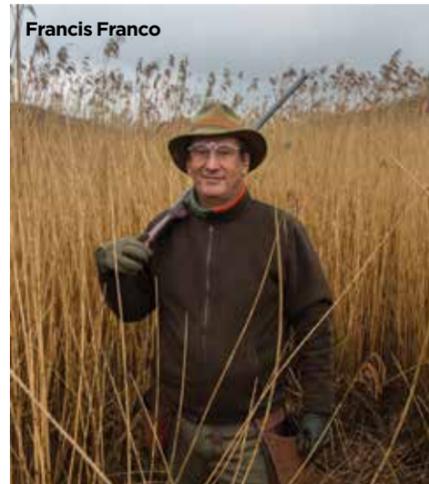
Recently deified as “Grouse God” in an American magazine, does Burtt instruct his loader to whisper throughout



Phil Burtt



Jonathan Kennedy



Francis Franco

that a rash of grouse fiends are thinking of trading in their side-by-sides. Quietly generous to country causes, he's devoted to the pursuit of wild quarry whether feathered or finned, spending weeks hunting the notoriously tricky brown trout of Lough Corrib.

JONATHAN KENNEDY

Excluding Sundays, there were probably at least two days last season when Kennedy wasn't tumbling grouse. He remains as accurate, generous and modest as ever. His ability on long birds is extraordinary and he'll consistently kill birds at 50yd. Always encouraging lesser mortals, he urges them never to dwell on missed birds.

DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland's name “is synonymous with consistency and accuracy”, observes another top shot. His Grulla side-by-sides are deceptively souped up with adjustable chokes and an integrated recoil system, enabling him to shoot a steady diet of 32g No 7 Sipes from 12 August onwards.

PAUL PORTZ

Always good company and never aggressively competitive, Portz's raw enthusiasm for wild sport is undiminishing. Demon on grouse, he's also a pigeon fanatic (a coupling common to many in this section). Be careful if you're invited to dinner – his freezer's stuffed with things awaiting resurrection as decoys.

MICKY TYLOR

The owner of the Lanarth woodcock shoot is a key player in the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust's woodcock study and is, unsurprisingly, one of the best 'cock-shots in the country. But this Cornish farmer is also a proper job when it comes to driven grouse.

PHEASANT PROFESSORS

MARK DENNING

A regular at Haddeo (20 years) and Combe Sydenham (15) he “not only shoots the highest of birds cleanly but he does so against all the odds as he constantly switches throughout the season between his pair of Purdey side-by-sides and his Beretta over-and-unders with a multitude of different cartridges. Keeps his spirit of fun throughout the day with no outward signs of competition but relying wholly on natural skill. He really is very good!” Happily, this paragon does have one vice: getting his aging Audi stuck and asking the keepers to rescue him.

SIMON FORD

A fixture on the high-bird circuit, “Fordy's” commitment is such that he even went to a fluffy-towel retreat for “treatments” to get into fighting form for the season. Rumoured to be giving Mary Berry some tips for her next Aga book, having found that his FOB cartridges like a spell in the warming oven.

COLIN FRENCH

According to one agent, “he never has an off day like the rest of us.” While others fiddle with chokes and squibs,



Mark Denning



Simon Ford



Andrew Maund

French “just uses the same guns and loads throughout the season with devastating effect”. Also runs his own small shoot, doing all the feeding and keeping.

JOHN HEAGREN

The Bisley Shooting Ground's shooting manager has been at the top of the coaching game



Dan Reynolds

for 20 years. The one old dogs turn to when they need to learn new tricks, Heagren shows how it's done on the real thing, felling archangels with the heavy artillery that's now standard kit on the high-bird shoots.

CASPAR MACDONALD-HALL

Based at Castle Hill, he has shot at “around 2.5 to 1 at the highest pheasants, making him the most consistent gun I've seen this season and the most competitive,” says one informant, adding, “he's always pushing the boundaries of our sport and his ability.”

ANDREW MAUND

Renowned for killing his birds cleanly and in front. On archangels Maund employs Browning and Miroku 12s fed with High Bird RC4 Oro 35g No 4s, a combination that resulted in him shooting, “over 80 super-high birds on one drive in Gnaton, Devon, without missing”. Looks like John Bull and comes armed with a sense of humour that can offend lawyers.

NIGEL MUSTILL

There are men who shoot and then there are shooting men. Mustill is definitely one of the latter, says our informant, “being a first-class pheasant-shot, a top bloke and one of only a handful of real sportsmen I see nowadays”.

IAN MUSTO

“If there were an Olympics for game-shooting he would be in the GB team,” says one fan. “Accurate, lightning-quick and deadly, the pheasants don't even know they are dead. An all-time great shot and modest with it.”

DAN REYNOLDS

The Roxtons consultant has been on Exmoor as long as the Doones and manages Milton's and Wellshead. As such, he sees a lot of rather tall pheasants and has worked out how to drop them on the “rare” occasions he carries a gun. One of the old-school sportsmen who makes that part of the world so special.

SIMON ROOD

Now gunroom manager for William Evans, Rood “is a real high-bird supremo,” says one witness, “killing the highest and fastest pheasants in the beak with his Miroku”. His employers must be pleased as, “there isn't a day's shooting that he has turned down since I've known him,” a friend comments. ➤



Simon Rood

ALL ROUNDERS



Lord Stafford

SIR EDWARD DASHWOOD

Endlessly enthusiastic, Dashwood is in hot pursuit of game all year, from double-figure sewin to monstrous boar. He'd admit that he's no high-bird specialist but if it's wild, feathered and within 45yd we'd be amazed if it did not fall to his shot. And when it comes to woodcock, he's had more doubles than a Scot at Hogmanay.

GEORGE DIGWEED

Even if you're a 23 times world champion it's hard to impress a Yorkshireman. So when Digweed pointed to the far horizon and told his hard-bitten loader, "that's where I'll kill the first brace," there was a certain degree of silent "oh aye'ing" – which stopped abruptly as the loader tried to keep up with the cascade of dead grouse. An equally gnarly Westcountry loader writes, "Digweed is still at the top of his game – an incredible reign as World Champion spanning nearly 30 years now. It puts him in the super league of British sportsmen, along with Sir Steve Redgrave, etc, and he is as good on live quarry as he is on clays."

JOSÉ "PEPE" FANJUL

Fanjul has a passion for British game-shooting. "From the start of the British grouse season to the end of the American quail season in April, he will be shooting five to six times a week somewhere in the world: grouse at Knaresdale, pheasants at Alnwick, partridges in Spain, duck in Italy or quail in Florida," we're told. Uses a variety of over-and-unders and has a kennel of labs and English pointers. "A complete Anglophile", he serves elevenses at his shoot in Florida

from a 1953 Rolls Royce shooting brake.

RICHARD FAULDS

Last December, Faulds announced his retirement from competitive shooting after a career that included five Olympic appearances, culminating in an Olympic gold medal in 2000. That's not good news for quarry species, as Faulds will now be able to concentrate entirely on game. High pheasants, late grouse, February pigeon – Faulds excels at them all.

ROB FENWICK

The managing director of EJ Churchill



José "Pepe" Fanjul



Francois Michaud

seemed to pop up everywhere last season, from the North Yorkshire moors to the Welsh high-bird shoots. As the old saw has it, practice makes perfect – and Fenwick's getting a lot of practice, while running the shop with boundless energy. We suspect an excess of Lucozade and/or hidden Duracell batteries.

FRANCOIS MICHAUD

The French "Silver Fox" is considered his country's "top game-shot" who "simply never misses" with his 30in Berettas, choked full and full and fuelled with 36g of No 4s. We were worried, naturally, by a reference from one admirer to an "impeccable dress sense" but were reassured by the fact he's so good he's sponsored by Beretta.

LORD JAMES PERCY

One of Percy's endearing traits is his willingness to admit when he's off form (a modesty somewhat lacking in some other top shots). He freely admits in his book, *Field of Dreams*, to having been "monstered" by some November pigeon and "getting through the first slab without many more than a gamebag full". But that doesn't happen often and his usual form is such that we are genuinely surprised when he misses.

LORD STAFFORD

Francis Stafford remains at the top of his and everyone else's game, whether it's high pheasants, grouse or English partridges. Performed flawlessly at the Duke of Norfolk's wild-grey day last October, tumbling rights-and-lefts while watched by a dolly mixture of sporting hounds. "One of the most stylish shots you'll ever be privileged to witness," says an admirer.

SIMON WARD

An extremely experienced hand, who sees thousands of people shoot every year, had no hesitation in naming Ward as, "without doubt, the best all-round game-shot". "Shooting at Prescombe he was killing everything at a ratio of under 2 for 1." Part of his success is due to his precise judgment of range: he does not address birds that he is not completely confident of killing cleanly.

NICK ZOLL

Not much seems to escape Zoll, whether it's Englishmen on his syndicate's wild-game shoot in Norfolk, driven grouse, wigeon on the Wash foreshore or pigeon over chopped

LADIES

SALLY CANNON

Married to Michael Cannon, owner of Wemmergill and a class performer on the moors, Mrs C manages to be both "a brilliant hostess and a demon grouse shot". "She has that happy knack of staying statue-still until the *moment critique* then – pop, pop – another two grouse are falling dead in front of her butt," says our northern witness.

ANNE-SOFIE ("FIE") FOGHSGAARD

A regular winner on the European ladies' competition circuit, the Danish hot-shot hones her driven game-shooting on the family estate in Scotland. Like all proper Vikings, she can hold her drink, seeing off the feeble Englishmen at a recent pre-shoot session in Norfolk

CHARLOTTE KERWOOD

Kerwood won her first trap-shooting Commonwealth gold medal at the age of 15, just three years after she took up shooting, and won her fourth 12 years later at the Glasgow Games. Blessed with Wonder Woman reactions, Kerwood can drop a driven bird while the average male gun is computing "pheasant".

SERENA ORR (NEE WILLIAMS)

The recently married daughter of Charlie Williams spent her honeymoon adding a black wildebeest and a warthog to her collection of trophies – she already had gold-medal roe and wild boar. Enjoying a reputation as a "Westcountry woodcock hot-shot", Orr can be found throughout the season "favouring her father's high Caerhays pheasants, armed with a pair of side-by-side Ariettas that she has used for the last 15 years to deadly effect".

LADY KATIE PERCY

The Duke of Northumberland's shooting gene has undoubtedly been passed on to his daughter. "I stood next to her all day at Alnwick in a January gale and it was quite extraordinary," recalls one admirer (himself no slouch with a gun). "She was wiping my eye, her mother's eye and even her father's and uncle's eyes – all day long!"

SALLY PRENDERGAST

Married to Chris Prendergast, a Wiltshire farmer who's also a high-bird professor, Mrs P has the advantage of shooting regularly on the family farm, which can easily show birds

on the edge of range. Noted for her immaculate hosting of appallingly lively shooting lunches held after the last drive

LOUISE STIMSON

Stimson is a regular loader and picker-up on the grouse moors, which leads to a fair bit of practice at back-end birds and some very bruised egos among males who don't like being "eye wiped by a girl". Recently won the ladies' class in the Golden Grouse competition by a country mile.



Anne-Sofie ("Fie") Foghsgaard

CAROL WEATHERALL

Few ladies appear in our awards who really shine at high birds, mostly because they do not get the necessary practice, but Weatherall holds her own, dropping a "right-and-left at Castle Hill, with one falling one side of the aqueduct, and one the other – and that only happens if they're cloudscrapers". Is the holding-hands friend of Ron Dennis, the Formula 1 maestro.

ROSIE WHITAKER

Taken grouse-shooting by her father, Sir Joe Nickerson, when she was nine, Whitaker is now doing the same for her young family. Has

Claire Zambuni



sold more than 10,000 copies of her book, *How to be Asked Again: How to be the Perfect Shooting Guest*. One of the ways is the ability to shoot straight and that ability, plus her charm, sees Whitaker writing a lot of thank-you letters.

CLAIRE ZAMBUNI

The 6ft Diana was out of action in the 2013/14 season with a wing down. But she's now repaired, changed to lighter Beretta 20s, put in weekly shooting lessons and is back to previous form, shooting a run of right-and-lefts at Brigands' archangels. ➤



Serena Orr

YOUNG BUCKS

EARL OF ARUNDEL

You need decent reactions to be a racing driver and Henry Fitzalan-Howard made a good fist of it, finishing 15th in the Formula 3 Championship in 2008. Like many others his age, he's now putting in long hours in the City but when he's in the shooting field his reflexes are put to excellent use. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he excels on the wild grey partridges at the family shoot at Peppering, taking them well out in front.

MARK GILCHRIST

The ultimate armed forager, Gilchrist supplies his Game For Everything catering company with the spoils from his own gun, be that pigeon, rabbit or pheasant. Success in the catering world requires cost control and Gilchrist is very frugal indeed with his cart-ridge-to-meal ratio.

BERTIE HOSKYNs-ABRAHALL

Bertie H-A, once best known for his plus-fives, is, we're rather shocked to discover, named "one of the best landed estates lawyers in the Spear's 500 list" (whatever that may be). But in the far more exclusive *Field's* Top Shots list, H-A still makes the cut, perhaps because one of his specialities is advising clients on the purchase of grouse moors.

TOBY MILBANK

The son of Sir Anthony is "as keen as they come. Shuns his immaculate Holland 16-bores in favour of a pair of 'lager and chunders', which he wields with ease." His annual species



Bertie Hoskyns-Abrahall

EARL PERCY

If you're a Percy it's almost *de rigueur* to shoot well and George Percy is no exception. "Wonderfully modest, George shoots everything from grouse to high pheasant with ease," says our source. "Can already beat his father, Ralph Northumberland, at some of the indoor shooting video games and will soon be challenging on the shooting field itself."

FRANK SPEIR

"Cuts a distinctive silhouette with a hooked beak like a goshawk and just as deadly," says our source. "Nothing that looks vaguely within range gets away without a barrel and it is surprising what he can achieve with what looks like a couple of old fence posts."

MATTHEW SWIFT

Shoots 70-plus days a season with three dogs to heel (all steady) and is punctilious about finding wounded birds. Using a Lancaster side-by-side, "he's a remarkable shot on game.



Peter Wilson

EDDIE WYVILL

Wyvill is "mustard keen" and "revels in every aspect of the day, so much sought-after for his reliability, both with gun and in the lunch hut". Dropped a "stinky-high" pair of Canadas ■



Matthew Swift

Whether it's grouse, partridge, pheasant or vermin, everything is in trouble when it's in range of Matt, "says our source. "He seems to live the winter in breeks - we can't understand how he is still married."

WILLIAM VAN CUTSEM

"The best of the four brothers, which is quite an accolade as they all shoot very straight, William is as stylish and as accurate as his father Hugh Van Cutsem," reveals our man. "When shooting five guns at Hilborough, William left the front line to shoot as back gun and killed every bird that was missed."

PETER WILSON

Our young gold-medal hero of the 2012 Olympics has announced his retirement from competitive shooting to concentrate on coaching and running the family farm. Happily, being in arable will allow him the whole season off to display his undoubted panache on those high Dorset birds.



Mark Gilchrist