

I'm proud and lucky to be here'

On the farm: The *Countryfile* presenters



**On location in Essex, Paralympian Steve Brown tells *TV Times* about his life-changing injury and his joy at becoming a presenter on *Countryfile***

**FACTUAL**  
**Countryfile**

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**I**f Paralympian-turned-*Countryfile* presenter Steve Brown had listened to his school careers advisor, his life may have turned out differently.

'I wanted to be a sports person playing for England and he said, "That won't be easy, what's your plan B?" Then I said I wanted to be like David Attenborough and travel the world learning about wildlife, and he said, "Reel it in, lots of people want to be like Attenborough"', recalls Steve, who turns 36 on 2 June.

Steve has proved that teacher wrong in style – captaining Team GB in the wheelchair rugby at the London 2012 Paralympics and becoming a regular contributor to BBC1's popular magazine show.

'They are the two things my careers advisor said I'd never be able to do and here I am,' laughs Steve as *TV Times* meets him near Chelmsford, Essex, where he is shooting a film about medieval longbows for this Sunday's *Countryfile* [see box, right]. 'I just hope he's watching!'

It's not just his careers advisor's low expectations that Steve has overcome – he has achieved both of his childhood dreams after sustaining a life-changing injury. Working in Germany for a holiday company in 2005, Steve, then 24, fell from a first-floor balcony and broke his neck. The injury left him paralysed from the chest down.

Dream job: Working with wildlife has been a lifelong goal

Photographed for *TV Times* by Richard Kendal

**'That changed everything,' he admits. 'I lost my confidence.**

I'd been travelling the world and now I was scared of leaving hospital. Being introduced to wheelchair rugby was a massive turning point. A lot of people I met had worse injuries and I thought, "Who am I to worry about my future?" To then see my team come fifth in London was amazing.'

A dislocated thumb thwarted Steve's hopes of competing at the Rio Paralympics in 2016, but the injury allowed him to concentrate on pursuing a TV career when he was asked to be a BBC pundit for

**“If you're happy, whatever life throws at you, you see the positive”**

the Invictus Games and part of C4's presenting team for Rio.

'Everything crashed down when I couldn't go to Rio and I had to reinvent myself again, so now being a *Countryfile* presenter is brilliant, and I'm proud and lucky to be here!' beams Steve, who also features on *The One Show*. 'I love wildlife, there's so much diversity in the British countryside and this job is giving me so many opportunities.'

**Steve's enthusiasm for the countryside is infectious,** and his constant wisecracking – 'Make sure you tell your readers about my terrain skills,' he chuckles as he manoeuvres his chair over uneven ground in the woods – has made him a hit with *Countryfile* viewers.

'Strangers get in touch and they don't say, "It's great seeing a guy in a wheelchair working on a wildlife show", they say, "Your enthusiasm for voles really comes across", or "We love your cheeky smile"', he says. 'I was nervous people would



Steve with *TV Times* writer Caren

say, "Steve is part of the *Countryfile* team because he's in a wheelchair". But nobody worries about the chair, it isn't the centre of attention.'

Steve's love of wildlife was nurtured during his childhood by his father, when the family lived on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent.

**'I'd always watch things like *The Really Wild Show* or *The Trials of Life*, and I'd head off to find sticklebacks, newts and frogs in the river near home, or go into the fields and catch grasshoppers, or help out with orphaned lambs on a farm,' says Steve.**

'Dad was a massive influence. We'd walk the dog and listen to the skylarks. Now I do the same with my nephew. I can't take him to football, but I can take him out with a bird book and teach him patience and empathy.'

Steve's family is pretty chuffed that he's working on *Countryfile*.

'My family loves the countryside,' he says. 'As a kid, *John Craven's Newsround* was my bread and



In action: Steve competing at the 2012 Paralympics

butter, and now I can tell my dad I spent the day with him. My uncle asked me the other day, "Can I come on a *Countryfile* shoot with you?" I was so happy to say yes.'

Steve still hopes to emulate David Attenborough and travel the globe sharing his love of wildlife.

'People say, "If that accident happened to me, I couldn't do what you have done; I'd be sitting indoors watching TV", but I always wanted to do my best and my injury hasn't changed my character,' he says. 'If you're happy, whatever life throws at you, you see the positive.'

'I've always liked to overcome challenges. I make the most of any situation and this is just another situation.'

CAREN CLARK

Old craft: Steve gets a lesson in bow making



**LIFE IN THE PAST LANE...**

**E**ncircled by woodland, *TV Times* has been transported back in time as we stand in front of a roaring campfire surrounded by baskets of newly-made arrows and men dressed in medieval smocks.

We're watching expert bowyer Tom Mareschall, who teaches traditional crafts and archery, show Steve how to make a medieval longbow as part of this week's episode of *Countryfile*.

'It's so much fun seeing how people use the countryside,'

smiles Steve. 'I've been taught how to make longbows and I've learned there is a difference between an ash longbow that a novice would make and shoot, and a yew bow, which is far more expensive because it's denser and takes longer to grow, so that is left to the professional bowyers and archers to work with.'

'Later, we're off to a blacksmith's to forge medieval arrowheads, and then I'll be doing archery. It's amazing. I don't care who I'm up against, I'm going to win!'