



Robson Green

The actor and presenter of *Extreme Fishing* is happiest participating in some form of fieldsport, though when it comes to cage-fighting he is just an observer. By **Charlotte Reather**. Photograph by **Giles Park**

I first bumped into Robson Green at a cage-fighting event at the Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow, as you do. Through the throng of Kappa-clad meatheads and orange, plastically enhanced strippers, I spied the handsome actor. I knew he was a keen fisherman and after preparing a line in my best Geordie accent – which went something like “Show mi yer rod and I’ll show yer mi scampi, like,” I deftly secured an interview.

We meet at the Talbot Inn in Ripley, Surrey near his home that he shares with his wife Vanya, son Taylor and stepdaughter Lara. Robson orders a light lunch – he’s in training for the role of a male escort in a forthcoming ITV drama, *Trade*. “It’s highly sexual so I need to be ripped.” He smiles at me; I go all unnecessary. This angler doesn’t need bait to reel in his prey – he could just hypnotise it with his piercing blue eyes.

The 44-year-old actor was taught to fish in Northumberland by his uncle, Matheson Green, when he was a boy. “I’d done a lot of trout and salmon fishing before working on *Extreme Fishing*. I fancied myself as a bit of an expert – how wrong I was!”

Initially when Robson was asked to present the Five programme he turned the opportunity down. “I’m an actor, not a presenter. But when the producer said, ‘Do you want to go round the world, meet interesting people, try extreme methods of fishing in extreme places with extreme species of fish and get paid a lot of money?’ I said, ‘Does Barbara Cartland wear make-up? Sign me up!’

“I’m rubbish at fishing but I really enjoy it. I think the viewers tap into that – I’m the underdog and it’s about the challenge. The show has taken me to Costa Rica, South Africa, New Zealand and the Philippines and I’ve tried some seriously strange methods of angling. One of the most ridiculous was kite-fishing. Basically, the bait hangs down from the kite and can go much farther than you can cast it, up to 2km out. We were with a German-Irish-Kiwi guy who was an expert. We sat there for

eight hours and nothing. The more worried he got, the more German he became. Then the line snapped and we took another two hours to retrieve it. I said to him, ‘Have you got a girlfriend? No? I’m not surprised, this is a bloody disaster!’ In the end we did catch something but it wasn’t my cup of tea.”

Back in British waters, Robson enjoys two miles of single-bank fishing on the River Coquet. “I fish to wind down. I’ve spent 26 years of my life putting on make-up in a caravan and playing characters and there’s a kind of schizophrenia to it. But when I fish, walk or shoot, I’m me, I’m Robson. It’s the only thing that makes sense. Fishing is very good for you, psychiatrists recommend it.”

And it’s something Robson’s son has taken a shine to. “I took Taylor to a local lake to teach

“Do you want to go round the world, try extreme fishing and get paid lots of money? Does Barbara Cartland wear make-up?”

him the basics of fly-fishing. On his second cast he caught a 10½lb rainbow trout, which broke the record for that lake. The elderly lady who had previously held the record for 10 years stared in astonishment at the fish. Through gritted teeth she congratulated Taylor on his achievement but not long afterwards was found sobbing in a heap. It’s absolutely true. She was devastated!”

Is Robson a salmon or trout man? “I’m not a purist, I’m a fisherman. I enjoy both. But to watch a fly-fisherman is like Yeats, it’s poetry. I get really emotional when I see the most beautiful Spey cast or when a guy catches a salmon on a cast that deserves a fish”. I venture his favourite film is *A River Runs Through It*. It is.

“The best book about fishing is Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*. It’s about this old Cuban fisherman’s struggle with a giant marlin. In the programme, we caught a marlin

but I didn’t want to put it back, I wanted to feed the whole village but our guide said no. It weighed 600lb and was exhausted. When a fish is exhausted it sends out distress signals that predators pick up, leaving it vulnerable. You’ve got to be careful.”

Robson’s views on catch-and-release have sparked controversy in recent months, setting many in the angling community against him. “Apparently, I’m no longer an ambassador for fishing, which is sad, but it’s fine because I stand by my comments on coarsing. I believe putting a fish back beyond recovery after having your picture taken is wrong. I don’t get it. For me fishing is hunting. It’s about food.

“People can romanticise and wax lyrical about fishing as much as they like but in no way is this view shared by the fish. When it’s out of water it’s not where it wants to be. I never go fishing on a full stomach when we film the show – I want to eat what I catch. That’s my opinion and what I prefer.”

Robson enjoys shooting and has enjoyed days on the Mitford Estate in Morpeth as well as various let days. “I like the experience. For me it’s not about the gun or

how many birds you shoot, it’s about how you feel. I love the connection with nature, the fresh air and the euphoria of getting your quarry. I think it goes back to our forefathers when if you didn’t go back with a bird or fish, you didn’t eat. Eating what you’ve caught tastes better and you appreciate it more.”

Robson is very connected to his native Northumbria and, he assures me, is more likely to be found at a local point-to-point than a cage-fighting do. “My father wanted me to be a jockey but it didn’t work out that way. I sponsor local point-to-points and used to own a racehorse, but that’s as close I’ve come to a career in racing.”

So we should thank our lucky stars Robson didn’t become a jump jockey or we might have been robbed of the Nineties pop sensation Robson and Jerome and their classic remake of *Unchained Melody*... ■

'The countryside is in my DNA'

Actor Robson Green talks to Charlotte Reather about his lifelong love of fishing and rural life

You might remember Robson Green from his days as one half of 90's pop duo 'Robson and Jerome' (a part of his career he terms as 'his Vietnam'), you might have caught him acting in popular TV shows such as 'Soldier Soldier' or 'Wire in the Blood', but more recently you will have probably seen him presenting the hugely successful Channel 5 series, 'Extreme Fishing'.

My own experience of Robson has a strange genesis. It was back in 2008 when I was still drinking hard liquor and had a taste for older men. I'd been forced along to a cage fight at the Radisson Edwardian, Heathrow and I wasn't happy about it. In fact, when I arrived and saw the sea of meatheads and strippers in bum-bras who'd all been viciously attacked by spray tan and peroxide, I wanted to go home.

Well, the sensible half of me did, the maniac side (I'm Gemini) relished such uncharted territory and sought to create mischief. By the middle of the evening the maniac and vodka had won and, not only was I relishing the violence in the cage, I was joining in with the testosterone-addled crowd shouting 'switch him off', as men in leotards beat, bit and tore at each other's hair. (I don't think Queensbury rules applied).

And that's when, across the sweaty throng, I spied Robson Green, a man with country sensibilities lost in the mêlée. Like me, he too was putting on a brave face, pretending to enjoy himself at this Peter Greenaway-esque cock fight (or so I thought, I later found out his favourite movie is 'Warrior!').

'I must go to him and talk about fishing,' I thought. And so, emboldened by alcohol and gratuitous violence, I approached the actor to see if I might write an article about him for a country magazine. Amused that I wanted to talk about Spey casts amidst the fray, he agreed to an interview and, well, four years later, dear reader, I wrote a book with him.

'Extreme Fishing' brings together Robson's experiences of fishing and

Charlotte Reather

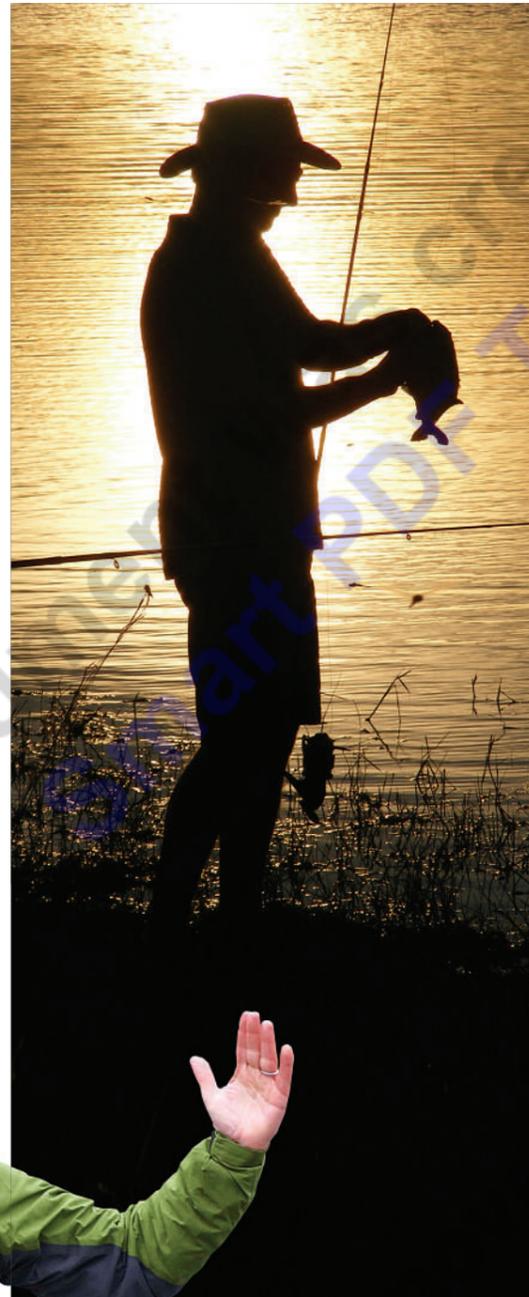
Charlotte is a freelance writer and comedienne who is always on the lookout for adventure



traveling the world on his eponymous TV show, together with our shared philosophies of people, hunter-gathering and the natural world.

From ice fishing in Siberia, mining eggs on the side of an active volcano in Papua New Guinea and struggling with the mekong giant catfish in Thailand; to surviving a Force-10 hurricane on a Canadian trawler, catching 30lb king salmon in Patagonia and dancing the Salsa in Havana, the book charts his extraordinary modern-day fishing odyssey with tales of victory, defeat, struggle, joy and, most of all, laughter.

It is Robson's finely tuned sense of humour, along with his knowledge and passion for the countryside that brought us together artistically. 'The countryside is just so important to me. I suppose it's my antidote to modern life, especially cage fights!' he says. 'Once I'm there, particularly when I'm in Northumberland, I feel at peace. The solitude, fresh air, sense of space, the landscape and rivers all give me a sense of self



IT WAS THIS BIG! Robson laments one of his big catches that got away

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HOOK, LINE AND SINKER: Robson loves the challenge that extreme fishing gives him

Countryside interview

and belonging and, for me, fishing is an extension of that.

'It's funny but I find going for a walk or fishing so normal but I have friends in L.A. who just don't get it. But then I don't get city life,' he says. 'It's like I was designed to be in the countryside. It's in my DNA.'

Many of Robson's ancestors were, in fact, farmers, particularly in the area of Rothbury, where he still fishes with his uncle, Matheson, today. 'My third great-grandfather was a farmer and his father before him.

'Before the industrial revolution took my family down the mines the Greens all lived off the land.'

Robson, like the brown trout he pursues, has a specific imprint of place on his genome, down to the exact tributary, in his case the River Coquet.

Some of his forebears' rural skills have trickled down the generations. 'My father, Robson, was a champion horticulturalist. He won fridges and lawnmowers with his prize-winning vegetables and flowers! And Matheson still has an allotment where he grows fantastic leeks and carrots in barrels, which are enormous, like they've been genetically enhanced.'

Robson says Matheson, who taught him to fish as a boy, is the true countryman of the family. 'He does it all,' he says. 'He was an amateur jockey and we still love going to the local point-to-points. In fact, my Dad and he both loved horses, from racing to looking after the pit ponies, which my father did when he worked down the

“ I suppose I've been away widening my horizons, but the wider they've got the more I yearned to be back home ”

mines. Matheson is a good shot, he fishes, and he knows about plant life and bird life. What he doesn't know about the countryside isn't worth knowing.

'And he never stops surprising me,' he adds. 'He always has new tips about flies, feeding behavior and the life cycle of the may fly. He knows about weather patterns, water temperature, all the things that effect fish - honestly, he thinks like a fish, which is why he is such a great fly fisherman.'

Robson believes his country identity was forged on boyhood outings with his uncle. 'He taught me so much, like all the collective nouns. I still remember a parliament of owls, a murder of crows and my favourite, a preponderance of prawns.

'And, at 48, I find I'm still trying to revisit those days, aged seven, fishing with him. It's like a subconscious goal. It was a perfect time for me when I was truly calm and happy.'

Fishing is a sort of therapy for the star, which he says he needs to do, but he is also

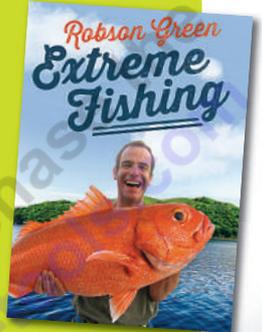
driven by another very different compulsion: the need to act, coupled with incredible ambition. These diverse activities create the two extreme counterweights in his life that he is constantly striving to balance.

However, Robson thinks he may be beginning to even the scales. 'I suppose I've been away widening my horizons, but the wider they've got the more I yearned to be back home.

'I truly believe that I've been pining for Northumberland for two decades but was scared that people would think I was somehow regressing into the past in an unhealthy way, when in fact it's my roots, my family, my home, my identity, where I belong and it defines who I am. I'm so happy to live there now and know that is where I shall dwell for years to come.'

So when it comes to clinching the second book I'll know where to find him - on the Coquet and, thankfully, not at the Radisson Edwardian, Heathrow. ✨

'Extreme Fishing' by Robson Green and Charlotte Reather (published by Simon and Schuster) is out on 23 May 2013 and available online or at all good bookshops. What a great Father's Day present!



IT'S A WHOPPER: Robson with one of his big catches made during Channel 5's 'Extreme Fishing'

