



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

I was in South Georgia the day after the northern bottlenose whale swam up the River Thames, and from afar, it appeared to me that our nation of animal-lovers excelled itself in its interest and concern. Thousands gathered along London's riverbanks as the attempt to save the frightened young whale was beamed across the globe by tv crews.

The odds were always against a bottlenose whale surviving in the Thames and the valiant rescue effort ultimately failed. But it did demonstrate a mind-boggling level of compassion.

So why aren't we mourning the deaths of the thousands of whales being killed every year by Iceland, Norway and Japan? The whaling situation is getting worse, and full-scale commercial whaling could resume before the end of the decade. Why does a single whale get more publicity than that? And why won't the Thames whale and all its supporters prompt governments to step up pressure against the whaling nations once and for all? The fact is that it's much harder to grasp the predicament of an entire population or species than the plight of an individual animal. This is why, despite all the valid scientific arguments against whaling, the only argument that will ever make a difference in the public mind is the sheer cruelty involved.

Just a few days after the bottlenose whale died,

Japanese whalers announced the invention of a new super-harpoon that explodes and hurls shards of metal through a whale's body to sever major nerves and blood vessels. It will be used to kill humpback and fin whales and it is being tested on live whales right now.

Meanwhile, Greenpeace has released footage of Japan's whale hunt in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary. The video shows a harpoon exploding inside a minke whale's back. The animal is winched up to the ship alive and struggles in agony for 10 minutes before dying. As experts from the International Fund for Animal Welfare have pointed out, this whale was killed with observers in plain view. Goodness knows what happens when no one is watching. If only whales could scream. Maybe then the rest of the world would wake up and listen.

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