

MARK CARWARDINE



On the wild thoughts that won't let him sleep. This month:

The 7bn person problem

The world's human population has just passed 7bn and, according to the UN, without radical action it's likely to reach 9bn by 2050.

You would have thought that such alarming news might have ruffled a few feathers, but instead it's business as usual.

Uncontrolled population growth is the elephant in the room that governments and environmental groups choose to ignore.

Over-population drives most environmental and social problems. When the World Wildlife Fund (now WWF) was founded 50 years ago, there were 3bn people. With more than twice the human population today, there are more problems, and more species at risk of extinction, than ever before.

As Sir David Attenborough recently observed: "I've never seen a problem that wouldn't be easier to solve with fewer people, or harder, and ultimately impossible, with more."

Pretending that human numbers can grow forever with no ill-effects is at best naive and at worst utterly irresponsible. It's not rocket science. The bigger the population, the thinner the world's resources are spread.

The solutions are obvious, though sometimes difficult to put into practice. This is partly because some

human rights and religious groups oppose measures by governments and others to influence individual fertility – and partly because past abuses in the name of 'population control' have clouded the issue.

Let's be clear: it's not about denying anyone the right to have as many children as they like. But, equally, wherever women have the right to vote, are literate, have help with family planning and have access to medical



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care, the birth rate falls.

If we don't take radical action, there will be terrible consequences. The human population will crash – whether as a result of famine, disease or wars over resources. Ultimately, there has to be a limit.

Join conservationist and BBC presenter Mark Carwardine on a BBC Wildlife reader holiday in the Highlands. See p81 for more details.