



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

More than 11 million people, from 130 countries, have been following the life-and-death struggle of a pair of nesting bald eagles. They've been watching a live video feed (www.ustream.tv/decoraheagles) from an eyrie 25m up in a cottonwood tree in Decorah, Iowa. The camera was installed by the Raptor Resource Project, and I have to admit that it makes compulsive viewing – I'm not at all surprised that it has gone viral on the internet.

But how on Earth did 11 million people get to hear about a pair of nesting bald eagles? I'm a complete dinosaur when it comes to the internet. I have email and a website, of course, and I do a lot of research on the web, but I'm the only person I know who isn't on Facebook. I would rather be tied up in a sack and dumped on a compost heap than Tweet, I rarely look at YouTube, and I've absolutely no idea what people mean when they say they are 'LinkedIn'.

The point is that I *should* know – and the conservation movement should know, too. Gone are the days when we could rely on TV, radio, newspapers and magazines to get our conservation messages across, simply because more and more people are getting their news and views from the web. How many of the people who've watched the feed would ever read a magazine article about bald eagles? Not 11 million, that's for sure.

Attracting such a massive audience – one that the eagles wouldn't otherwise get – is a laudable achievement. I have them playing in the corner of my computer screen right now and, as I write, with occasional sideways glances, I can see that I'm among no fewer than 161,486 people watching and that one of the parents has just returned to feed the two lively eaglets.

But so what? I know that people will say that it's 'raising awareness', but is this enough, and what does it actually achieve? Surely the real challenge is to turn all of those newly fledged eagle fans into something more concrete: 11 million campaigning signatures, for example, or even £11 million? Now, that would be using the internet effectively.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer and tv presenter.



Internet star: one of the bald eagles watched by the world's Web surfers.

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