



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

Is nothing sacrosanct? It's hard to believe, but the Tanzanian government has decided to go ahead with plans to build a commercial highway through the northern end of the Serengeti. It will completely bisect the path of the great migration of at least 1.3 million wildebeest and zebras.

I'm not denying that a road link between East African ports and the fast-developing Central African countries is important for this impoverished region, but it doesn't have to go right through one of the most important protected wildlife areas in the world.

Imagine what this means. As soon as the construction work is finished, the road will need to be expanded, and in no time at all, it will be a six-lane highway, with a railway line running alongside it, and thousands of heavy trucks and speeding cars will be crossing the Serengeti every day.

Then they will need to erect fences to avoid collisions with wildlife. Wildebeest and zebra numbers will collapse, so the big cats and other predators that follow them will virtually disappear. And that would mean the end of the greatest wildlife spectacle on the planet.

Meanwhile, the transport of livestock through the park will inevitably transfer devastating diseases to wildlife, and easier access to critical areas will lead to increased poaching.

What is the Tanzanian government thinking? Doesn't it realise that the migration is more fundamental to the future of the region than a politically motivated short-cut?

But we're not much better in Britain. Over the next decade, billions of pounds are going to be spent on environmentally disastrous road-building schemes. Construction recently began, for instance, on the Weymouth Relief Road that will devastate part of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, including 10 per cent of the Two Mile Coppice ancient woodland, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

What is the point of having protected areas such as these – and the Serengeti – if we're not going to protect them?

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist and tv presenter, and will be presenting a *Last Chance to See* rhino special with Stephen Fry in the autumn.



Double trouble: roads can spell disaster for wildlife such as zebras.

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