



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

I'm beginning to feel as if I've heard it all before. Since I first began working in conservation in the early 1980s, Japanese whaling, the Canadian seal hunt, rhino poaching and so many other conservation issues have become as familiar a part of daily life as incompetent politicians. The latest déjà vu is deforestation in the Amazon. Figures for December show the highest rate ever recorded for that time of year – 948km² destroyed in Brazil alone. But doesn't it happen every year, or am I imagining things? Nothing much seems to have changed since deforestation first hit the headlines. I remember writing articles predicting doom and gloom in the Amazon 20 years ago, and I quoted similarly horrendous figures as we read today – the phrase “an area the size of Belgium lost every year” springs to mind.

Have all those years of fundraising, campaigning, pleading and cautioning by conservation groups made the slightest difference? I suppose the positive view would be that it must, at least, have slowed the rate of destruction



Amazon destruction: do we still care?

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– but it clearly hasn't been enough. I've just returned from the Amazon and the scale of the place beggars belief. According to one calculation, it drains an area larger than the whole of western Europe. Describing it as big is like describing Bill Gates as fairly well off, and this makes the sheer scale of destruction all the more difficult to comprehend. Since 1970, some 700,000km² (or 17 per cent) of the Brazilian Amazon has been destroyed, equivalent to an area the size of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Germany and Denmark combined. But because we've heard it all before, such revelations are less shocking than they used to be. Of course, it's good that conservation issues make headline news. But it's bad that we seem to be nowhere nearer solving them. Our senses are dulled as the inevitable stories of destruction become little more than background noise. And with that we lose the degree of outrage and determination needed to continue the fight.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, author and tv presenter.