

MARK CARWARDINE



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

Fighting a failure of funding

How many officers do you think there are in the Metropolitan Police's Wildlife Crime Unit? One hundred? Fifty? Actually, there's two: a police sergeant and a police constable (plus one member of civilian staff).

They are expected to deal with everything from illegal bird-trapping to the trade in rhino horn and other products from endangered species. Given that London is a major hub of international wildlife crime, their workload is huge.

But now the animal-welfare charity the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) has intervened, providing £100,000 a year to pay for more staff and resources.

I think WSPA is right. Despite outstanding successes, the three people working for the Wildlife Crime Unit can't possibly tackle the city's hardened criminals on their own.

Besides, this funding is a natural extension of the initiative Operation Charm – a partnership between the Met and WWF, the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation and other groups that was established several years ago to boost efforts to resolve the problem.

But what a disgraceful situation. NGOs shouldn't have to spend their limited resources propping up a government body. I know

that wildlife crime will always be at the bottom of the pile, but it's the state's duty to enforce wildlife laws and bring criminals to justice.

If a fully funded body isn't possible in bankrupt Britain, then the best alternative would be a completely independent body, like the RNLi (which receives no money from the Government and is much better for it).

Instead, we have a halfway house: an organisation run by the Government but

Spot the rare species (hint: it's not the polar bear).



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part-funded by NGOs, which is the worst possible scenario.

One thing is certain: we won't have a leg to stand on the next time we point a finger at the lack of progress in tackling wildlife crime elsewhere, given the lack of resources we put into it here.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer, writer, conservationist and BBC TV presenter.