

MARK CARWARDINE



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

The politics of protest

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry when I saw a recent press release from IFAW. It reveals (not for the first time) that Japan's "dying whaling industry" is being propped up by millions of pounds a year in public money. That sounds like good news, though I seriously doubt that the Japanese whaling industry is on its deathbed just yet.

But then the press release goes on to say something quite shocking: "Now is the time for concerned citizens, NGOs and governments around the world to stop bludgeoning the good people of Japan and start helping them migrate from whaling to whale watching."

What a total contrast with Sea Shepherd's approach to whaling – its latest direct-action campaign against Japanese whalers in the Antarctic is called Operation Zero Tolerance.

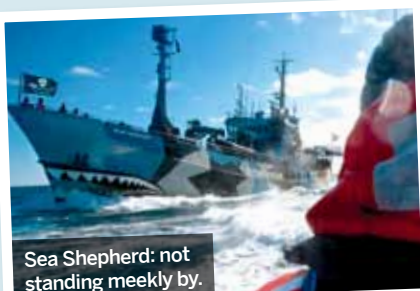
Even WDC Whale and Dolphin Conservation, when it's not too busy changing its name from the perfectly satisfactory Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, finds time to lead public protests against Japanese whaling.

So who's right? As always, there is no easy answer. True, boycotts rarely work: they didn't stop whaling in the Faroes and they're not going to stop Japan. In any case, if we take that approach, we

could be boycotting most countries in the world for one atrocity or another.

Likewise, much as I admire the brave and determined souls from Sea Shepherd, I fear the repercussions of direct action: it tends to make the targets dig their heels in even deeper.

IFAW suggests that whale watching (the age-old argument that whales are worth more alive than dead) is the long-term answer. But Japan, Iceland and Norway



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all have flourishing whale-watching industries and yet they continue to hunt whales.

And, surely, anything is better than standing by meekly as the Japanese kill yet more whales – in the vague and fuzzy hope that they'll eventually see the light?

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