

MARK CARWARDINE



WHY MADAGASCAR SIMPLY NEEDS HELP

Why aren't we all losing sleep over Madagascar? It is stuffed full of endangered wildlife – lemurs, tenrecs and fanalokas (carnivores related to fosas) among them – and is under threat like never before. But it might as well be nothing more than the name of a Hollywood movie for all the attention it receives.

I think at least part of the reason is complexity. Most people probably couldn't point to Madagascar on a map, let alone explain the intricacies of its environmental problems.

When it comes to conservation, we seem to like simplicity. It is much easier to raise money to rescue a sad-looking rhino from a dilapidated zoo in Tenerife than to raise money to help rhino conservation in Africa. Rescuing one unfortunate rhino is an easy concept that has a beginning, a middle and (most importantly) an end. Protecting wild rhinos in Africa, on the other hand, is convoluted and seemingly endless.

And yet it's still easier to galvanise the world into action over wild rhinos than it is over an

otherworldly island that occupies a murky corner in most people's minds.

Nevertheless, the island should be one of the highest conservation priorities on Earth. Virtually all of the wildlife living there exists nowhere else – Madagascar has nearly 200 endemic mammals; more than 1,000 endemic birds, reptiles and amphibians; and a dizzying 11,000 endemic plants.

MORE THAN 90 PER CENT OF MADAGASCAR'S ORIGINAL FOREST COVER HAS GONE ALREADY.

Undeniably it has been top of many people's 'worry list' for a very long time, and there have been some remarkable conservation successes. But more than 90 per cent of Madagascar's original forest cover has gone already, and its endangered wildlife is clinging to an increasingly precarious existence in the rapidly disappearing fragments that are left.

Complicated or not, how bad does the situation have to become before the rest of the world sits up and takes notice?