



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

Spending time with professional wildlife photographers makes me turn a dark shade of green. Can there be a better way of earning a living, I often think. No wonder they stimulate such envy in lesser mortals forced to make ends meet by more traditional means.

But I'm beginning to see another side to their glamorous globe-trotting. I've just returned from Australia, where I was trying to photograph dwarf minke whales underwater. These slightly smaller versions of the common minkes found around our own coast spend the southern winter in a remote corner of the northern Great Barrier Reef. I was away for 26 days altogether and came back with roughly 20 sellable photos – and a massive hole in my bank balance. The trip will almost certainly never pay for itself.

Last year, I went to Bosque del Apache, New Mexico, to photograph that classic scene of a trillion snow geese taking to the air en masse. But on the day I arrived, there was a grand total of one goose, hiding under a bush and looking decidedly ill. In fact, the poor bird died overnight. Admittedly, other snow geese arrived as the days passed – but they were far too few and I never got my shot.

I had a good time trying, of course, and I'm not complaining. But if I relied on wildlife photography to keep a roof over my head, a little profit would have come in handy. In reality, few wildlife photographers manage to earn a living exclusively from taking photos. They have to lead tours, run workshops, give lectures, write articles and pen books to survive. Sometimes, inevitably, it all comes together and a trip will pay for itself several times over. I recently spent a week photographing pink river dolphins in the Amazon (*BBC Wildlife*, December 2007), and more than covered my costs. But now, when I flick through the stunning photographs in *BBC Wildlife*, I don't just marvel and think, "How did they do that?" – I also find myself wondering, "How did they afford to do that?"

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, author and tv presenter.



Minke puzzle: was this shot worth the trip?

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