



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

Extinction would be too good for ITV's recent conservation offering – *Extinct*. ITV has ignored the natural world for more than 15 years, and suddenly, now that conservation is cool and trendy, it's turned green faster than the Incredible Hulk. But it's waded in by dumbing down the future of the natural world to the level of a gameshow, complete with excitable studio audience. It was *Planet Earth* meets *The X Factor* – with one per cent *Planet Earth* and 99 per cent *X Factor*.

I know all the arguments for aiming at the lowest common denominator. It reaches people who wouldn't normally watch programmes about conservation and it raises money. And I admit that some of the field reports – such as Graeme Le Saux's piece on mountain gorillas – were actually quite good. But others weren't. I feel for the orangutans. It's bad enough being endangered without having Sadie Frost championing your cause.

The biggest omission was the lack of anyone qualified to comment. Trevor McDonald and Zoe Ball were clearly in the studio to represent gravitas and youth, but what do they know about conservation? David Attenborough wouldn't present the news or the Radio 1 breakfast show, would he? Even the experts in the field came and went faster than most B-list celebrities.

The endangered species were depressingly predictable, too. It would be hard to imagine Anneka Rice cooing over an endangered no-eyed big-eyed wolf spider, of course, but picking the obvious flagship species was cheap. So much for the survival of the fittest – this was survival of the cutest. Or were viewers voting for the celebrities with the most convincing crocodile tears?

Actually, the voting was the worst part. *Extinct* should have been filmed in the Colosseum, where the mob once decided whether gladiators should be saved or doomed in the same way. What next? How about *The X-ray Factor*, in which television audiences choose which heart patients should get a transplant? It's not so far-fetched, after all.

So much for the survival of the fittest – this was survival of the cutest.