



# MARK CARWARDINE

## WILD THOUGHTS

I was delighted to see that whale-watch operators from around the world were gathering in Tokyo just before Christmas. With Japan's whaling fleet already en route to Antarctica to hunt up to 935 minke whales and 50 endangered fin whales, there was nowhere better for such a get-together.

The meeting was convened by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, and the delegates – including some from Norway and Iceland, the only other two countries still whaling for commercial purposes – spent two days discussing the continued growth of the whale-watching industry. Already estimated to be worth an astonishing \$2 billion a year, whale watching offers a realistic, humane and sustainable alternative to the cruelty and wastefulness of whaling.

But the growth of whale watching alone – no matter how many countries around the world are taking part – is not enough. It helps, of course, but the countries that really count are the ones that fly in the face of world opinion and continue to kill whales. We need more whale devotees in Japan, Norway and Iceland to change attitudes from within those countries.

International pressure and high-level diplomacy are crucial, but unfortunately the more a country is told what to do by 'outsiders', the less it is inclined to do it.

We've seen this in the Faroe Islands. This small territory of Denmark has faced decades of scorn and boycotts from the rest of the world, yet continues to kill hundreds of pilot whales and dolphins in the cruellest way every year. In fact, conservation groups have found that when they make vociferous protests, the level of hunting actually increases.

We would probably behave in a similar way. Just imagine if the French suddenly launched a scathing attack on Britain for killing badgers. We would certainly take umbrage. Some might even support the badger cull just to spite our meddling neighbours.

We can get upset about these atrocities, but it's vital that we also quietly assist national solutions to national problems.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer and tv presenter.



**The growth of whale watching is not enough to protect these species.**

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