

MARK CARWARDINE



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

The Beeb and the bear cubs

Claims that the BBC misled viewers over footage shown on the recent *Frozen Planet* series have prompted heated debate about honesty in wildlife film-making.

National newspapers revealed that one particular sequence – showing a polar bear tending her newborn cubs – had been filmed in a zoo in the Netherlands. They claimed that viewers were “outraged” because the BBC had failed to reveal the truth. The BBC, meanwhile, argued that it had written the commentary carefully to avoid any dishonesty and had “clearly explained” about the footage online.

I think that both sides are wrong. The BBC is wrong, because it doesn't matter how the commentary was written – the zoo scenes were clearly mixed with wild ones to imply wildness. And it's a blatant cop-out to claim that everything was above board simply because the location of the zoo sequence was revealed deep within the BBC's website. How many viewers will have found that?

Equally, the newspapers are wrong to have made a mean-spirited swipe at probably the best natural-history series ever produced. There is nothing immoral about filming under controlled conditions – it's often the only way to capture certain scenes without

harming animals or risking the lives of the cameramen.

So why can't the BBC be more honest and the papers more realistic? I agree with Sir David Attenborough that revealing the zoo sequence in the middle of the programme would have ruined the atmosphere, but the producers could have come clean in the 10-minute ‘making of’ slot. Most viewers would have been interested in why the cubs had to be shot in captivity.



State of bliss: they're not even aware of being the centre of a media brouhaha.



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There are parallels with wildlife photography here. As soon as you start cheating, by manipulating images or passing off captive animals as wild, all trust evaporates. And the surest way to ruin the atmosphere is to abuse that trust.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer, conservationist and BBC TV presenter. Read more from Mark on p64.