

MARK CARWARDINE



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

Carrying the can for tuna

It's so easy to hear good news about an environmental issue and then relax in the mistaken belief that it's all been sorted. How many of us have read the words 'dolphin-friendly tuna', for example, and immediately stopped worrying?

But shocking footage just released by Greenpeace shows that tuna fishing can be anything but friendly. Shot by a whistleblower – a helicopter pilot who was working with the tuna industry in the Pacific – it reveals an appallingly high daily bycatch, not just of dolphins but also of sharks, manta rays and other non-target fish, as well as turtles and even baleen whales.

The fundamental problem is the persistent use of fish aggregation devices, or FADs. These are man-made rafts (usually trackable by satellite) that attract tuna – and a host of other marine wildlife. The fishermen simply locate the rafts and then use vast purse-seine nets to scoop up everything around them – adult and juvenile tuna, and anything else that gets in the way.

FADs are popular with the tuna industry because they increase the catch – this is yet another concern, because there are simply too many fishing boats trying to catch too few fish. Indeed, according to the latest IUCN

Red List of Threatened Species, just updated, no fewer than five out of the eight species of tuna are now in serious trouble.

But there is good news. The UK is the second-biggest market in the world for tinned tuna (after the US) and, thanks to efforts by Greenpeace and others, our major supermarkets and tuna brands are setting an example by committing to end the sale of tuna caught using FADs.

Now it's up to the rest of us



Even fish as large as whale sharks are netted as bycatch.



Vast purse-seine nets scoop up adult and juvenile tuna – and anything else that gets in the way.

to make sure that they keep their promises. Always ask supermarket staff if their tuna – and, indeed, all of their other fish – are from sustainable and wildlife-friendly stocks. If we all do it often enough, the message will get through.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer, conservationist and BBC TV presenter.