

MARK CARWARDINE



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

The truth about Mr Wolf

When I saw pictures of children in wood-and-mesh cages by bus stops in New Mexico and Arizona, allegedly to protect them from wolves, I thought April Fool's Day must have come early.

But it's true. The cages are a fear-mongering stunt designed to stoke up opposition to a planned federal law that may soon make it illegal to kill wolves in the area. The gist of the campaign is, 'What sort of society puts children in cages while letting predators roam free?'

Yet 75 Mexican wolves – much smaller versions of the grey wolf – have lived in the area since they were reintroduced in 1998. And they've never attacked anyone.

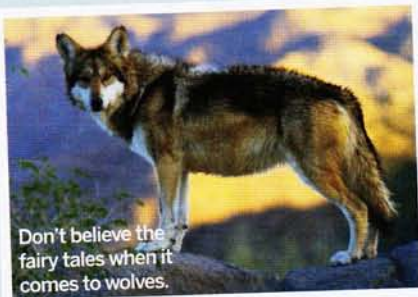
The truth is that wolves are scared of people – in my experience, they run away when they see you.

And no wonder. Just imagine sharing the planet with the likes of Discovery Channel's *Yukon Men*. This so-called 'reality' show has to be one of the worst TV series ever produced. It follows the residents of a small town in Alaska which, according to the testosterone-fuelled claptrap that purports to be a commentary, is under siege from hungry predators.

The series makes ridiculous claims about wolf attacks – ignoring the fact that there have been just two

fatal attacks in the whole of North America since the beginning of the century – as some sort of distorted justification for their 'kill or be killed' attitude towards every wolf, wolverine, bear or any other predator that dares to wander anywhere near their town.

But we Britons don't have a leg to stand on when we criticise people who demonise wolves. We're so paranoid about large predators that we wiped



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them out centuries ago, and the mere mention of bringing wolves back to the UK is consistently met with howls of protest.

Indeed, if an urban fox dares even to look at a small child, the entire country is put on red alert. It's pathetic.

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