

CONSERVATION IS EVOLVING LIKE crazy. Make no mistake – we still need to protect habitats and save species. Without traditional conservation, with its relatively moderate, steadfast way of doing things, the world's wildlife and wild places would be disappearing even faster than they are already.

But anyone who believes that saving a wildflower meadow here, or protecting a hen harrier there, is the answer to all our problems is out of touch with the realities of our rapidly changing world.

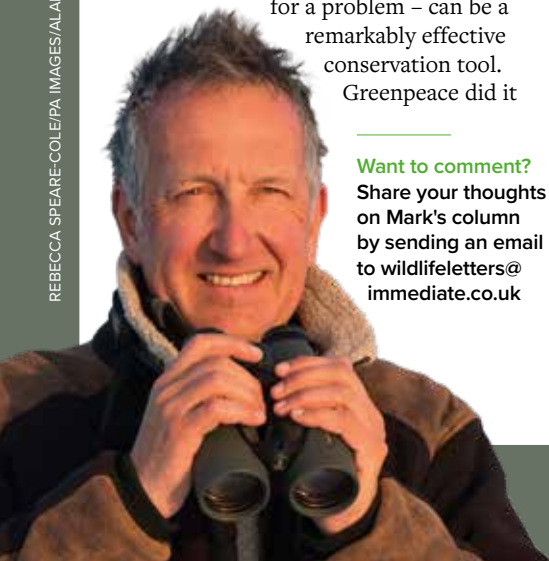
Nowadays, many of the most urgent and important conservation battles are being fought in boardrooms and shareholder meetings. Rapid, large-scale environmental threats are forcing conservationists to consider more innovative – and often controversial – tactics. This is why Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain, Just Stop Oil and other more radical, hard-core environmental groups are popping up thick and fast. They are filling the gap being left by some of the more traditional conservation groups.

Admittedly, some of their tactics can be counterproductive. I agree with Jane Goodall's recent comment that blocking roads, for example, risks alienating an otherwise sympathetic public. Supergluing your face to the M25 doesn't make the rest of the country care more about climate change (let alone make politicians leap into action). It certainly gets publicity – but the headlines are all about the campaigners and their antics rather than their intended message. (Ironically, in a fresh crackdown on radical activists, the Public Order Act has just hit the statute books and, among other things, it makes supergluing yourself to key national infrastructure a new offence carrying a potential 12-month jail sentence and an unlimited fine.)

But the reality is that being polite often doesn't work. I've long since given up any hope that business leaders (and politicians) would respond to courteous requests by doing the right thing.

Well-targeted direct action, though – taking aim at the very people responsible for a problem – can be a remarkably effective conservation tool. Greenpeace did it

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A protestor is carried away after trying to enter BP's AGM in April

“The most urgent conservation battles are being fought in boardrooms”

MARK CARWARDINE

OPINION

masterfully in the 1970s and 1980s, bringing everything from whaling to rainforest destruction to the world's attention. And now these contemporary, innovative groups are taking action of their own kind.

There have been some truly inspiring examples in recent months – with climate change the critical catalyst. BP, for example, found itself in the crosshairs of green campaigners earlier this year after rowing back its climate pledges (from a 35-40 per cent cut in oil and gas production by the end of the decade to just 20-30 per cent). In a year

of bumper, eye-watering profits for the energy giant, climate protesters disrupted its annual general meeting and demanded an investment shift towards more low-carbon energy and renewables. The oil company faced a backlash from shareholders, too – at least four large UK pension funds voted in favour of a resolution calling for BP to align

its emissions reduction plan with the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Meanwhile, Reclaim Finance – a research and campaigning organisation founded in 2020 to lobby for the financial sector to align with global climate goals – is lobbying for financial institutions such as the European

Central Bank to integrate climate considerations into their operations. The financial sector, of course, is in a unique position to lend to, and invest in, businesses that take environmental responsibilities seriously – and will be pivotal in mobilising the necessary financial resources for the

transition to a green economy.

There's no denying that traditional conservation (for all its continuing importance) has failed to halt mass extinction. It's recently evolved counterpart – striving to redefine business as usual and galvanising the transition from exploiting nature to restoring nature – is our best hope yet. **W**

“Supergluing your face to the M25 doesn't make the rest of the country care more about climate change”