



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

After prevaricating for months, I finally plucked up the courage to calculate my carbon footprint. I wish I hadn't.

Everything was fine until it came to travel. "One long-haul flight can increase your carbon footprint by up to 24 per cent," I was warned. I take at least 30 long-haul flights every year, plus an embarrassment of shorter hops in between, so I feared the worst. Indeed, one online calculator put my travel carbon footprint at 102 times the national average.

In my defence, the footprint for the rest of my life is significantly less than average. And when it comes to caring for the planet, I consider myself a model citizen. I work in conservation and raise thousands of pounds for charity. I never leave my tv on standby (if everyone in the UK did the same, we'd save the equivalent output of one large power station). I recycle, walk everywhere and looked after injured birds as a child. But perhaps my giant carbon footprint sends all those efforts up in smoke?

I've tried to convince myself that it's OK. Most of my travel is to do with conservation – everything from documenting the work of anti-poaching patrols and counting whales to running tours to countries where wildlife wouldn't survive without tourist dollars. Besides, the real blame lies with big business (especially low budget airlines), the Government (if nothing else, for planning to build a third runway at Heathrow), and the military (which uses nearly 25 per cent of all jet fuel). But I haven't convinced myself to feel completely guilt-free.

I could offset my emissions by putting more money into tree-planting or renewable and sustainable energy schemes. For just £34 I can offset 3,700kg of carbon dioxide, which is equivalent to a long-haul return flight. Then I could keep travelling and sleep soundly at night. But that's too easy. Surely a simple reduction in carbon emissions is far better than carbon offsetting?

But you know, the more I think about it, the more I wish I'd prevaricated for longer.

One online calculator put my travel carbon footprint at 102 times the national average.