

MY WAY OF THINKING

MARK CARWARDINE

The broadcaster and campaigner asks whether conservation groups need to join forces, and invites your thoughts on the subject.

How many different conservation groups can you name? Stick to the UK, to make it easier. There are the obvious leviathans, like WWF, Greenpeace, RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts, but what about the many smaller groups? The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, World Land Trust, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation and Marine Conservation Society immediately come to mind. Then there are the specialists, like Whale and Dolphin Conservation and the Bat Conservation Trust. Ah, but what about Fauna & Flora International, the Born Free Foundation and WildAid?

It's not surprising that there are so many. One organisation alone couldn't possibly grapple with climate change, plastic pollution or rainforest destruction, for example, let alone all the, relatively, straightforward issues. I've just done a quick search online and, in 10 minutes, found 65 different charities involved with rhino conservation. I'm sure there are many more. But with three rhinos being killed for their horns every day in South Africa alone, you could argue that even 65 is nowhere near enough.

Then there are the local issues to deal with – everything from migratory birds being hunted in Malta to sloths and howler monkeys being electrocuted by uninsulated power cables in Costa Rica. It sometimes feels as if the number of conservation groups could double, treble or even quadruple, and there still wouldn't be enough to cope with the escalating onslaught.

But their sheer number can actually be a hindrance, too. The

current overcrowded mishmash of conservation groups clearly isn't working. We are not exactly on a winning streak, are we? First, there is the obvious problem of duplicated effort. Conservation groups and projects too often operate in isolation. Time and again I see them clustered in the same location – or trying to solve the same problem – yet working alone. They are wasting hard-earned cash, and time, by reinventing the wheel.

There have been international, national and local efforts to collaborate for many decades. Indeed, most of the big species-recovery and landscape-scale projects are now done in partnership. But in an ideal world, every conservation issue would have a commonly adopted blueprint for action, with clearly identified goals, pooled information, and a properly

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co-ordinated response.

The second problem is one of confused and mixed messages. Many conservation issues are complex (so much so that even the experts don't always agree on exactly how to tackle them) and when politicians, business leaders and members of the public keep hearing different and unnecessarily convoluted arguments (or, worse, see disagreements within the conservation world itself) the message gets lost.

Climate change is the classic example. It took a ridiculously long time to convince the world (albeit minus President Trump and Lord Lawson) that it is threatening life on Earth, no less, and is our fault. I don't think even the BBC got it until very recently – always insisting on a global warming sceptic being present to 'balance' every debate. But the point is that conservationists must take some of the blame: a more co-ordinated alarm call would have helped.

I realise that conservation groups are in competition with one another – often chasing after the same money, wooing the same supporters and hankering after the same limelight. But they are allies, too, with common goals. If they could at least speak with a united front, they would greatly increase the chances of driving public opinion and forcing change. 🐘

MARK CARWARDINE is a frustrated and frank conservationist.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? If you want to support Mark in his views or shoot him down in flames, email wildlifeletters@immediate.co.uk



How many conservation groups are needed to save the black rhino?