

# MARK CARWARDINE



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

## Big trouble in China

I have moaned about appalling Chinese attitudes towards animal welfare and conservation many times over the years. It seems to upset some people but, quite frankly, I don't think we point an accusatory finger at China nearly often enough.

So I'm going to do it again. The latest outrage is a contemptible new fashion accessory to hit Beijing. It is a key-ring containing a live animal. Essentially a sealed plastic pouch filled with brightly-coloured water, it imprisons a turtle hatchling, a newt or two small fish.

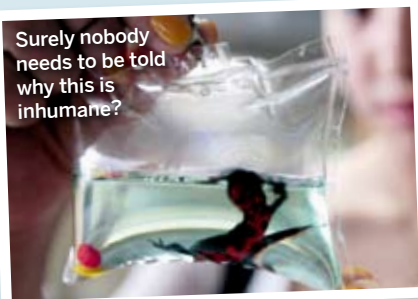
It's highly likely that the animals trapped in these transparent tombs will run out of oxygen and die within hours or days. Yet the key-rings, which are being sold for as little as £1 each on the street, in subway stations and even outside schools, are proving to be highly popular.

Not all Chinese people are oblivious to animal pain and suffering – some well-meaning passers-by have been buying the key-rings and freeing the animals inside, which merely fuels the trade, of course, but at least it shows some compassion.

Endangered species legislation aside, however, there is currently no law against abusing or killing animals in China.

One is being drafted, in consultation with the RSPCA, but the threat of legislation has prompted intense and heated debate among the Chinese and I do wonder if it can ever be effective or enforceable, at least in the short term.

I'm the first to admit that selling a live animal in a sealed bag is by no means top of China's long list of animal cruelties. Many years ago, I worked undercover on animal



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welfare issues in China and witnessed such appalling atrocities that it has affected me ever since. But what worries me is that the key-rings are encouraging a whole new generation to feel absolutely no empathy for animals at all.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, photographer and TV presenter.