

# MARK CARWARDINE



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

## What price the osprey?

**T**he health check undertaken by 25 of the UK's top wildlife organisations (Agenda Analysis, July) revealed what we all instinctively knew: that our wildlife is in serious trouble indeed. Just one of many shocking statistics in *State of Nature* – that the UK has lost 44m breeding birds since the late 1960s – demonstrates the severity of the situation.

So I've been wondering if we should be prioritising our conservation efforts more ruthlessly. Perhaps we should focus more on species that are endangered on a global scale, such as the freshwater pearl mussel – or at least on species for which we are internationally responsible: the UK is home to nearly half the European population of common seals, for example.

But that approach implies that any species doing fine elsewhere in the world should be a lower priority – and that doesn't feel right.

The osprey, for example, is a success story by any standard (with a current UK population of 250–300 breeding pairs), but it's also one of the most widespread birds on Earth. So have all the efforts to bring it back to the UK been misguided?

And how about the common crane? Getting it to breed here again – albeit unsuccessfully (see p41) – for

the first time in hundreds of years is a remarkable achievement, but seems to ignore the fact that there are some 400,000 individuals of the same species in dozens of countries all across Europe and Asia.

But if every country took this attitude, there might be nothing left at all. Despite all the limitations, we do have to try to protect everything.

A quick glance at the list of organisations involved in *State of Nature* shows that,

The osprey: a rare UK conservation success story.



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in theory, we are in a strong position to do just that: from the Bat Conservation Trust and Buglife to the RSPB and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, we've got it covered.

What we most desperately need – and haven't got – is a wildlife-friendly government.

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