

# Telegraph UK

## Is Barack Obama deaf to the call of the wild?

### Barack Obama is doing even less to protect wildlife than George W Bush did, writes Geoffrey Lean.

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Now here's a wild card: Barack Obama is doing even less to protect wildlife than George W Bush did. As its first year nears an end, the President's administration has so far listed only two species – both plants – under the Endangered Species Act, compared with 11 at the same stage in the presidency of the "toxic Texan".

Admittedly, Bush's listing tailed off, averaging eight a year over his term in office, but that was four times what Obama has achieved. And both pale besides the averages of 65 and 58 listed under Bill Clinton and the elder Bush.

The current administration has angered conservationists even more by halving a proposed safe habitat for bighorn sheep, and in removing protection for the grey wolf in the Northern Rockies. "They are failing to grant badly needed protection to animals and plants on the brink," says Nicole Rosmarino, of WildEarth Guardians.

"There is no longer a clear ideological opposition to endangered species, but they have not exactly made it their priority either," adds Noah (great name for a conservationist) Greenwald, of the Centre for Biological Diversity.

The administration promises that the pace of listings will pick up. I know Tom Strickland, an assistant secretary of the interior, who is in charge of wildlife protection, and expect some progress. He is, for example, proposing the protection of 200,000 square miles of Alaska for polar bears, the biggest area ever set aside for any endangered species. But he needs to move fast.

#### Ever green giant who has earned his rest

There's a touching ceremony on Monday, at which one of Britain's

hardest-working and most respected conservationists will cut down a couple of trees.

I know that sounds odd, but bear with me. The conservationist is Lord Clark, who is retiring as chairman of the Forestry Commission. He himself planted the trees, now being thinned as part of a regeneration project, when he signed on as a 16-year-old forest worker at Chapel House Wood, near Lake Windermere, in Cumbria, 54 years ago.

When I started covering the environment, David Clark was one of only two MPs I could find who was really interested in the issue.

He later became – I think – the first green MP to serve on any party's front bench, being repeatedly

elected to the Labour shadow cabinet, to the apparent bewilderment of successive party leaders.

As a result, Tony Blair was forced to take him into his first government, but Clark was too straight for the new prime minister and his cronies, and was sacked in the first reshuffle. It probably didn't help that he was preparing a truly radical Freedom of Information Act.

Clark was then in with a chance of being elected Speaker, and told me at the time that he would make Blair more accountable to the Commons. Not surprisingly, the leadership preferred to lobby for Michael Martin – with consequences we all now know.