

Plastic Pollution Destroys Marine Wildlife

By negligently discarding plastic items, especially plastic water bottles, fishing gear and plastic bags, people are unknowingly causing the deaths of millions of mammals, fish, birds and reptiles each and every year. We defile the face of the earth with plastic refuse creating waterway contamination. Since the invention of plastic earlier this century, it has become a popular material used in a wide variety of unique and innovative applications. Plastic is used to make, or wrap around, many of the items we buy or use. The problem comes when we no longer want these items and how we dispose of them, particularly the throwaway plastic material used in wrapping or packaging. Plastic is accessible, lightweight and quickly discarded. Too quickly discarded. Plastics are widely used as they are easy and inexpensive to manufacture, strong and durable. Regrettably these same desirable characteristics make plastic an overwhelming pollution problem. Low quality and low cost means plastic is readily discarded. Plastics take around 300 years to photo degrade. Its long life assures it survives in the environment for extended periods where it can do great harm. Plastic does not easily decompose and requires high energy ultra-violet light to break down, therefore the massive volume of plastic waste in the worlds' streams, rivers and oceans is steadily increasing. Plastic is now found in virtually all the oceans and rivers of the world, even the most inaccessible and once pristine. Oceanographer Charles Moore says the amount of toxic plastic pollution in the worlds oceans is so extensive it's beyond cleaning up. A toxic plastic graveyard double the size of Texas swirls in the waters of the Pacific between San Francisco and Hawaii. There Moore and his crew found that the water contained six parts of plastic for every part plankton, with a five times escalation in the amount of plastic between 1997 and 2007. Over 500 billion plastic bags are used worldwide every year and the total is growing. That is an unconscionable amount of waste, so much that more than one million bags are used every minute and their impact on the planet is devastating. Plastic bags are only part of the crisis. America alone, yearly produces more than of 800,000 tons of plastic bottle pollution. Around the globe, our precious planet is defaced and poisoned with more than 100 million tons of plastic pollution annually. According to the California Costal Commission, over 80 per cent of refuse within our rivers and coastal waterways, most of it being plastic, originates on land rather than coming from boats. Plastic affects marine wildlife in deadly ways: entangling creatures and by being consumed. Turtles are particularly devastated by plastic refuse. All seven of the world's turtle species are already endangered or threatened for a multitude of reasons. Turtles become entangled in fishing nets, and many sea turtles have expired with plastic garbage bags in their stomachs. Studies indicate turtles mistake these floating semi-transparent bags for jellyfish and eat them. The turtles die an inhumane death from choking or from being unable to eat. A dead turtle found off the coast Hawaii was found to have more than 1000 pieces of plastic in its stomach including part of a comb, a toy truck wheel and lank of nylon rope. There is great environmental concern about the effect of plastic trash on all marine mammals. These elegant creatures are already under threat for a variety of other reasons: e.g. seal and whale populations have been decimated by unregulated hunting. A recent study concluded that in excess of 100,000 marine mammals die unnecessarily each year as a result of plastic pollution. Worldwide over 100 bird species are known to ingest plastic. This includes more than 35 species located off the coast of South Africa. A recent study of blue petrel hatchlings at South Africa's remote Marion Island showed that 90 per cent of the baby chicks examined had plastic in their digestive systems, apparently fed to them accidentally by their parents. South Africa seabirds are the highest affected seabird population in the world. Plastics remain in the birds' digestive systems, stopping digestion and resulting in starvation. Scientific reviews are inconclusive about how much plastic birds and fish are eating, however scientist agree that plastic in seafood is likely to be harmful for people. Plastic is compared with better understood toxic materials such as mercury. Plastic acts like a sponge when in contact with poisons such as PCBs, concentrating them at levels that are millions of time more than in untainted seawater. Ingredients in plastic have been linked to cancer and reproductive abnormalities. Bisphenol A, found in plastic water bottles, has been shown to cause cancer in lab rats, to disrupt hormone levels and is associated with obesity and diabetes. Scientific studies also cause concerns that the massive swirls of floating plastic could contribute to global warming by creating a thick shady canopy that makes it difficult for plankton and plant life to sustain growth. Let's examine a few different ways where together we can make a change. The global crisis of plastic pollution demands urgent study and action. Business should be encouraged to reduce the amount of plastic used in packaging and to reuse and recycle. Plastic wrapping and plastic garbage bags should carry a warning label advising of the dangers of plastic pollution and shoppers should be encouraged to use earth-wise shopping bags of organic, natural materials or recycled plastic fibers. Please tell this to our law makers. The situation only continues to worsen. We must act now! Support re-cycling programs and promote environmental awareness in your local community. Take a pro-active stance in asking governments to make changes and consumers to adjust their attitudes. Purchase items requiring less plastic wrapping and advise store management why we are doing so. We can speak with a loud voice when we speak with our dollars. Choose to drink tap or carbon filtered water from a glass-lined reusable container. If you do purchase plastic bottles, dispose of the container properly. Please recycle. With the increase in environmental awareness, it has become painfully obvious that there is more that we can do to create a sustainable society. If every one of us would take a few tiny steps, make a few different choices and consciously consider our impact on the planet, there may be a way to restore the world to its original beauty and resources.

About the Author

Marlene Affeld's passion for the environment and all things natural inspire her to write informative and insightful articles to assist others in living a Green Lifestyle. For more Green Living info from Marlene visit Nandu Green at <http://nandugreen.com/index.php/Green-Lifestyle/Sustainability.html>