

# Marine Pollution

The seas around the UK have the potential to be among the most productive and wildlife-rich on Earth. However they are severely threatened by human disregard for these fragile habitats. Our seas have a remarkable ability to recover from damage but only if we give them a chance. We hope to raise awareness of the damage that pollution causes marine habitats and reduce human impact. In this way we can create living seas where marine wildlife thrives.

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Pollution in the marine environment from litter or chemical / oil spills can have a damaging and lasting impact on the marine ecosystem.

## Marine Litter

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) organises an annual beachwatch litter survey that has been running since 1993. The aims of the project are to raise awareness about the problems of marine and coastal litter, monitor levels and sources of litter and encourage action to reduce pollution at source.

The survey has identified that plastic litter on beaches has increased 146% since 1994. Plastic never biodegrades, it just breaks down into small pieces but does not go away. A recent study by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimated that there were 46,000 pieces of plastic litter per square mile.

## Marine Litter and Wildlife

### Plastic

Fishing nets, plastic bags and the plastic yokes of drink cans are the most common sources of entanglement, causing serious injury, death by starvation, drowning or suffocation.



Fishermen / Norman King

At least 136 species of marine vertebrate and 8 invertebrate species were reported in 2003 as entangled in marine litter. Items such as plastic bags and balloons are often mistakenly ingested as food items by some mammal, turtle and shark species, sometimes with fatal consequences. In 2003 a total of 177 marine species were reported to have ingested litter items, and 111 species of seabirds.



Cigarette end on beach / Trine Bregstein

### Cigarette Butts on the beach

It is estimate that cigarette butts are one of the main pieces of litter found on beaches, with an estimate of several trillion entering the environment each year. A survey carried out by MCS in 2008 recorded 10,500 cigarette butts on 374 beaches in only one weekend.

Cigarette butts cause problems for wildlife as they often mistake them as food but the cigarette butts can leach toxic chemicals, cause inflammation of the animal's digestive system and occasionally even death.

Despite the common belief that cigarette filters are biodegradable, the filters are made from cellulose acetate, a type of plastic which can persist in the environment for many years. Also consider this alongside what the butts are designed to absorb, such as tar, and chemicals found in cigarettes, such as cadmium, lead and arsenic. Subsequently these leech out into the water and can have a significant environmental impact. Experiments by K. Register in 2000 have shown that one cigarette filter is toxic enough to kill water fleas (*Daphnia magna*) in 8 litres of water.



Cigarette end on beach /  
Trine Bregstein

### Oiled Seabirds

If you find an oiled seabird you should contact the RSPCA (see below). Do not attempt to clean the bird yourself as this is a specialist job. It is advisable to contact an experienced bird handler to capture the oiled bird rather than doing it yourself. The RSPCA advice, if you can catch the bird without causing it undue stress, is to place it in a well-ventilated cardboard box and keep it warm. Take care in capturing and handling birds as they have very sharp beaks and can inflict serious injuries. Never hold a bird close to your own or anyone else's face.

### Things to do

Dispose of your litter carefully, think of joining the Adopt-a-Beach scheme or become a Beach Warden.

- ▶ **Bag it and Bin it** – don't flush plastic sanitary waste down the toilet, this includes cotton buds which have recently been on the increase in sewage related debris.
- ▶ **Reduce** – the amount of domestic and garden chemicals that you use as they all end up in rivers and subsequently the sea. Toxins from the manufacturing of food packaging have been detected in the bodies of dolphins so avoid buying over packaged goods.
- ▶ **Re-use** - the same applies for electrical and plastic goods, where manufacturing produces toxins - do you really need that new appliance?
- ▶ **Re-cycle** - so much of our waste ends up in the sea, try and re-cycle as much as possible.

### Contacts

#### Wildlife Trust South East Marine programme

<http://www.hwt.org.uk/pages/marine-2-south-east-marine-programme-680.html>

#### Marine Conservation Society

<http://www.mcsuk.org/>

#### Adopt-a-Beach

<http://www.adoptabeach.org.uk/>

#### Beach Warden Scheme

<http://www.pebbledash.org.uk/> Tel: 01243 863141.

#### Environment Agency Incident

Hotline Tel: 0800 80 70 60.

#### RSPCA

Tel: 0300 1234 999.



Beach litter / Shirley Brice

### Reference

Beachwatch 2003 The Annual UK Beach Litter Survey Report. Marine Conservation Society.

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