

Plastic Pollution

When people think about plastic, they may think of lots of everyday items that make our lives easier: food wrappers, toys, gadgets and even the pipes that carry water to and from our homes. In fact, plastic is so popular in the UK today that it is hard to imagine life without it.



However, while plastic makes human lives easier, it makes the lives of Britain's wildlife much harder. It could be putting the existence of some of our much-loved creatures in danger.



Plastic Waste Facts

160,000 plastic bags are used around the world every second.



8 out of 10 pieces of plastic made over the last 70 years have been thrown away.



Of all of the plastic waste created by 2015: 9% recycled, 12% burned, 79% in landfills or the natural environment.

Plastic and the Environment

There are many different ways that plastic can enter the environment:

- litter;
- washed down drains;
- spilled by ships;
- escaped from factories;
- blown out of bins;
- abandoned by humans.



So much plastic enters the environment each year that it can be found in fresh water, soil, air and oceans around the world.

The Problem with Plastic

Unlike paper, fruit peel or fabric, most types of plastic that end up in the local environment will not break down over time. The plastic will simply stay where it is forever unless it is moved by humans or eaten, by mistake, by wildlife.

A huge problem with plastic is the chemicals it contains. Over time, pieces of plastic litter will break into smaller pieces. These smaller pieces are often eaten by wildlife that think that it's food. Scarily, these tiny pieces of plastic contain poisonous chemicals and heavy metals that can kill wildlife. The chemicals make their way into the food chain and do not just affect the creature who ate the plastic but also affect any animal that



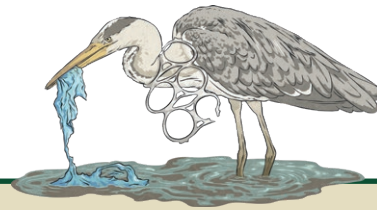
"Female Mallard By Water With Rubbish" by Martin Kessel

then consumes them.

Threats to Wildlife

The largest threats to wildlife from plastic waste in the environment are:

- becoming tangled in plastic waste which can cause death or injury;
- eating plastic waste by mistake which can cause wildlife to choke;
- poisoning from the chemicals within the plastic which can lead to illness and death.



How We Can Help

People around the world have caused the plastic problem we face today and it cannot be fixed overnight. The best way to stop any further harm to wildlife is by changing how we think about and use plastic. Some helpful tips are:

- Instead of using plastic items, such as straws and plastic bags, buy reusable items, e.g. Flasks for hot drinks and canvas shopping bags.
- Glitter (which is often made of plastic) and balloons can also be damaging to the environment and dangerous to animals, who may mistake them for food.
- Recycle as much of your waste as possible.
- Safely pick up litter you see in the environment.

