

Dead Whale Found With 88 Pounds of Plastic Inside Body in the Philippines

By Daniel Victor

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A beached whale found in the Philippines on Saturday died with 88 pounds of plastic trash inside its body, an unusually large amount even by the grim standards of what is a common threat to marine wildlife.

The 1,100-pound whale, measuring 15 feet long, was found in the town of Mabini with more than 40 pounds of plastic bags inside its stomach, along with a variety of other disposable plastic products. Darrell Blatchley, owner of the D'Bone Collector Museum in Davao City, attended a necropsy on the whale and called it the worst collection of plastic inside an animal he had ever seen.

"The plastic in some areas was so compact it was almost becoming calcified, almost like a solid brick," said Mr. Blatchley, who has seen other marine mammal post-mortems. "It had been there for so long it had started to compact."

Ingesting plastic gives whales a false sensation of fullness without providing any of the nutrients they need. It leads to reduced weight, energy and swimming speed, making them more vulnerable to predators. They have no way of digesting or expelling the plastic.

The whale's grisly death brought renewed focus to the worldwide problem of plastics ending up in oceans; a 2015 study estimated that five million to 13 million metric tons of plastic waste pollute oceans each year. But the problem is

particularly severe in the Philippines, the world's third-biggest contributor of plastic to oceans behind China and Indonesia.

Joel Palma, the president and chief executive of the World Wide Fund for Nature in the Philippines, said there was no single factor causing the Philippines' outsized plastic pollution. Single-use plastics are cheap and ingrained in the culture, recycling is difficult and there is a patchwork of local laws, among other challenges.

What is certain, he said, is the need to consume less.

"We're wasting a lot more than we should be," he said.

Hundreds of animal species are in danger when plastics end up in bodies of water, but whales tend to attract more interest because of the large quantities they can hold in their bodies. A whale found in Spain in February had 64 pounds of trash in its intestines and stomach. One found in Thailand in June 2018 had consumed 18 pounds of trash, while one found in Indonesia in November had ingested 13 pounds of plastics.

Mr. Blatchley said he could see a vivid example of the problem near his museum. A sign by a canal advertises a 10,000-peso fine — about \$190, well more than a month's salary on the Philippine minimum wage — for anyone who litters, but the canal is still "a foot deep with plastic garbage." There's little enforcement of the laws that exist, he said.

"Everybody acts like it's somebody else's problem," he said.

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