

ANIMAL INJUSTICE AND ENDANGERMENT: PRESERVE LIFE IN WATER TO PROTECT LIFE ON LAND

Arshia Varghese¹, Amrith Manoj², Athul K Binil³

ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the critical issue of marine life degradation, exploring the adverse impacts of marine debris, captivity in aquariums, and the brutal practice of shark finning. The author presents a personal awakening to environmental concerns, spurred by witnessing the distressing sight of a plastic straw extracted from a sea turtle's nostril. With a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all life, the author emphasizes the vital role the ocean plays in sustaining life on Earth, stressing that no species, including humans, should be considered more important than another.

Marine debris emerges as a significant global pollution problem, arising from human behaviour and carelessness. Plastic, in particular, poses a grave threat to marine creatures, causing ingestion, entrapment, and often leading to death. The author underscores the need for responsible waste disposal to prevent further accumulation in water bodies, which could soon surpass the weight of all marine life combined.

The paper also examines the detrimental effects of keeping marine animals in captivity, highlighting the cruel conditions and psychological toll it inflicts on voiceless creatures like dolphins and stingrays. Aquariums, intended for education and conservation, perpetuate the notion that it is acceptable to confine animals far from their natural habitats for human entertainment.

Moreover, the author explores the devastating practice of shark finning driven by international trade, causing significant decline in shark populations. The horrific process of cutting off live sharks' fins for delicacies, such as shark fin soup, raises ethical concerns and threatens the balance of ocean ecosystems.

To combat these pressing challenges, the paper stresses the importance of education and awareness. The author believes that only by fostering understanding and exposure to environmental issues can individuals become catalysts for change. Small steps, collective efforts, and responsible actions are identified as key solutions to preserving marine life and the health of our oceans.

Ultimately, this paper serves as a poignant reminder of humanity's responsibility to protect and conserve marine life. By addressing these issues and fostering sustainable practices, it offers hope for a brighter, more harmonious future for both humans and the creatures that inhabit our precious oceans.

Keywords: *Climate change, Environmental sustainability, Marine life, Plastic pollution, Sea turtle, Marine debris, Ocean pollution, Plastic straws, Plastic ingestion, Overfishing*

INTRODUCTION:

Like many of us, climate change and environmental sustainability is something I always knew and cared about but failed to act on until I saw a particular viral video of a plastic straw being extracted from a sea turtle's nostril. And yes, it is horrifying just as it sounds.

Even if one has never had the chance to see or touch the ocean, it touches you with every breath you take, every drop you drink, and every bite you consume. Everyone, everywhere is one way or another connected and utterly dependent upon the existence of the sea. And I think the greatest threat to our marine life is the belief that

someone else will save it. Only when the last fish is caught will one realize that there is no planet B. The worst part is we know how much the ocean serves us from food all the way to careers and yet we act like we have another option. In my opinion, no one species is more important than any other, including humans. I feel it is only selfishness in knowing that the more species disappear, the more likely our will as well. In fact, all life is an interconnected web, it is very hard to eliminate one without having a series of dominoes fall in their wake. Here I'll be talking about a few of the major problems that are affecting our marine life.

Marine debris:

The way I see it, whenever we go out, we throw our litter without giving it a second thought. May it be a chocolate wrapper or a cigarette butt or a soda can, we just can't wait till we see the nearest trash can or carry it till we reach home. I feel it is quite absurd when people think the world is their trash can especially for smokers who think the world is their personal ash tray. Eventually all this debris ends up in our water bodies and since most litter don't break down, they accumulate. In my opinion, although plastic was a great invention, no one ever looked at the long-term issues that would come from making everything out of plastic.

Huge amounts of metals, rubber, paper, clothes, fishing gear, and other lost or discarded items enter the marine environment every day. And this is why marine debris is one of the most widespread pollution problems facing the world's ocean and waterways today. When you think about it, all of these things are 'manmade'. Because it results from human behaviour, whether accidental or intentional. It can be hard to understand where it came from where it goes or how much is there.



A dead albatross chick found on Midway Atoll in the Pacific Ocean with plastic debris in its stomach.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



A seahorse wraps its tail around a plastic cotton swab near Sumbawa Island, Indonesia.

Courtesy of Justin Hofman

It is not new news that marine creatures ingest plastic. Which then eventually causes less activity and loss of appetite and make the fish unable to feed correctly and eventually die. And what happens if they don't die? We catch them and consume the plastic ourselves. As I was reading papers related to this topic, many studies have shown that there will come a time in the near years in which the oceans will have more plastic than fish. Almost like a plague of plastic.

At this point, all marine animals are either caught in plastic or digesting plastic. The statistics maybe hard-hitting but it is reality. There was a time when I went to a beach in another district in my native place and there was a one-legged sea gull hopping around. Back then, I didn't know what caused this but all I knew was that it was sad to watch it trying to walk but fall as it takes each step.

Save the turtles:



A sea turtle found in the Pacific Ocean had this debris in its stomach, according to The Ocean Cleanup, a foundation.

The Ocean Cleanup Foundation



A dead sea turtle was found caught in the fishing nets.

All this debris mentioned above can cause wounds, entrapment and even drowning. For doing this part of my research I contacted a friend of mine who volunteers at a turtle rescue camp near his house. He said that some turtles starve after consuming plastic because they mistakenly believe that they have eaten enough because their stomachs are full. A very common practice of humans is to release helium balloons, it's all fun to enjoy the show but what we don't realise is that what goes up, must come down. It gives us all temporary happiness but what did the innocent turtles who consume this do to deserve this painful death.

This brings me back to the video I saw before this paper, of a plastic straw being stuck in a turtle's nose. The straw was lodged into the turtle's nasal cavity all the way to his throat, which slowed down his breathing and sense of smell. Once this video went viral, many companies stop producing plastic straws, but this is just one small object. This is the effect one small object has on a marine animal. We barely spend a second before popping this small straw into our drink which we use for 10 minutes and throw.

Aquariums:

How do aquariums treat marine animals? Although the aquarium industry claims that it exists purely for education and conservation, what aquariums really teach us is that it is 'ok' to keep animals in 1) captivity, 2) bored, 3) cramped 4) lonely and 5) far from their natural homes just for people to enjoy watching them.

One might wonder how captivity affects these voiceless creatures. They tear families apart. In the wild, dolphins swim together in family pods of three to 10 individuals and sometimes in tribes of hundreds. But the chlorine and copper sulphate used to keep the tanks clean has caused their skin to peel off and sometimes even go blind. I feel this can be easily explained if we connect it to our life. Imagine you're enjoying your life with your family and friends and one day someone takes you away from them forever. This someone keeps you jailed inside a box and give you food you're not used to eating and air that you're not used to breathing. People pass by to see you every day with smiles on their faces, but no one ever helps you escape. This might sound like a nightmare for us but for the voiceless animals, this nightmare is reality.

The sad part is many dolphins are thrown back into water if they are considered 'unwanted'. If you take the example of a stingray, in many aquariums there's a special section called 'touch tank' in which you can touch them. We don't know if we want to be touched because they are denied swimming away in their cramped place. To make things worse, some aquariums even cut stinger barns leaving them defenceless. The tanks which hold these animals are sometimes only 'just' bigger than the fish. All this for human entertainment.

Shark finning:

There's a comic I read a couple of weeks back, in which a conversation takes place between a shark and a couple of other fish. The fish tell the shark to come play with them but then realise that he doesn't have his fins

and ask him about it. The shark tells them that ‘the humans’ cut his fins off and threw him back to the water. The fish then ask themselves why humans need fins and as if what they have taken is not enough. This when I found about this cruel practice that truly shocked me.



But at the same time, it isn't the only reason why sharks are in trouble. Overfishing of sharks is driven by international trade that goes way beyond their fins. Another reason why sharks are caught might come as a surprise; many cosmetic products have shark oil. But in my opinion, the worst is the gruesome practice of cutting off a live shark's fin and throwing them back into the ocean where it dies a slow and painful death. And all these guns are used in places like China and Hong Kong just for a bowl of soup.



Dried shark fins for sale in a Taipei market, © Craig Ferguson/LightRocket/Getty

I saw a couple of videos to get a better understanding of this and I found out that the fins have less to no taste at all and chicken stock is added to improve the flavour. Then why catch them in the first place? We might wonder what's wrong is one or two sharks are caught for making a bowl of soup? But we need a minimum of 10 for making 1 bowl of soup. An ocean without sharks is unimaginable but we contribute to this.

CONCLUSION:

The problems listed above are just few out of many that have contributed to our dying marine life. Many other problems such as oil spills, garbage from ships, and coral bleaching are a few more that have the same equal effect as the ones above.

At this point, if this keeps going on, I feel the weight of the ocean's plastics will exceed the combined weight of 'all' of the fish in the seas very soon. So even if we do collect all the plastic on the beach what happens then? We make it into a huge pile and then stand in front of it to post on our social network while the pile sits there

untouched to get bigger. There is nothing that can be done unless it is sorted, cleaned, and given to a processor. But nobody wants to do this much work. Even in this sorting procedure only one section gets selected, and the rest is again left to accumulate. And even if it is processed, it ends back in the ocean in some other form just because someone is careless. It is almost like a never-ending circle. For this purpose, I decided to talk to couple of my classmates and family members for understanding their knowledge about this topic and more than half of the people that I contacted aren't even aware of what is happening in our environment. I think one of most important ways to understand this is through education and exposure to such topics. When we have an overflowing sink at home, the first thing we do is turn off the faucet. That is, stop the root of the problem. I feel that by preventing what we do now, we can turn this faucet off and keep this problem from growing. I think one of most important ways to understand this is through education and exposure to such topics. At first, I thought that I and the people around me are helpless but even a small step can make a big difference and when you think about it, the health of all life depends on the ocean whether it is directly or indirectly.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Emerging Pollutants in the Environment. (n.d.). Google Books. Retrieved October 24, 2022, from https://books.google.nl/books/about/Emerging_Pollutants_in_the_Environment.html?id=oGmQDwAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y.

Google scholar. (n.d.). Retrieved October 24, 2022, from <https://scholar.google.com.sg/>.

Emerging Pollutants in the Environment. (n.d.). Google Books. Retrieved October 24, 2022, from https://books.google.nl/books/about/Emerging_Pollutants_in_the_Environment.html?id=oGmQDwAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y.

Google scholar. (n.d.). Retrieved October 24, 2022, from <https://scholar.google.com.sg/>

^Cuteifying^ spaces and staging marine animals for Chinese middle-class consumption. (n.d.). Taylor & Francis. Retrieved October 24, 2022, from

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14616688.2016.1196237>