

What are the dangers of plastic pollution in our seas and oceans?

Entanglement

There is a significant danger to marine life of getting tangled up in plastics and debris. Fishing gear and drinks packaging are the most common causes of entanglement. Turtles can become caught in nets and twine. Plastic waste on the beach can hinder turtles nesting, as they find it difficult to dig through the sand. Turtles caught up in floating plastic are subjected to increased drag when swimming, causing starvation or drowning.

Over 16 per cent (56 species) of seabirds have been recorded as caught up in plastic, after mistaking it for food, or accidentally swimming into it. Entanglement can lead to injury, infection or drowning of the seabird.

Ingestion

Plastic pieces are often mistaken for food as plastic breaks down into 'nurdles', which are small plastic pieces. Many marine creatures, particularly fish, turtles and birds, mistake the pieces for food. Sometimes an animal has no choice but to eat plastics because of the huge amounts that are in the water. For example, some types of whales take in large amounts of water each time they open their mouths to feed (up to 75,000 litres in blue whales!), resulting in the high potential of plastic being eaten.

As the plastic is broken down in their stomachs, toxic chemicals are released, which can lead to poisoning. Sometimes, plastic with sharp edges causes damage to animals' throats and insides, leading to infection or large pieces can cause blockage in the intestines of animals, or make them feel falsely full, which can result in starvation. Even if the animal does somehow manage to survive, its quality of life is diminished as it will struggle to catch food, or escape predators.