

Microplastics spread on Phillip Island

THEY may be tiny in size, but microplastics are a major environmental issue Phillip Island Nature Parks (PINP) is determined to help solve.

Phillip Island Nature Parks recently hosted a workshop led by the Australasian Microplastic Measurement Project (AUSMAP) to train and inspire 24 budding citizen scientists and staff to be able to measure the spread of microplastics on Phillip Island.

The training workshop included beach sampling and data collection for microplastics and involved Earthwatch, Plastic-Free Phillip Island, Westernport Water, local teachers, research students, high school students, interested locals and Nature Parks staff and volunteers.

Participants surveyed Summerland Beach and were dismayed to find that every sample of sand taken contained microplastics.

Microplastic pollution is almost invisible to the naked eye and is made up of tiny fragments measuring between 0.1mm and 5mm and, despite their size, they can be dangerous for wildlife and the environment.

Across the globe, microplastics are found everywhere including in our air, water and oceans. They move up through the food chain and we are finding them in the stomachs of many marine animals.

In a study on Phillip Island, the contents of 67 beach washed Short-tailed shearwater fledgling stomachs were analysed.

One hundred per cent of the birds contained plastic (average 7.6 pieces per bird) including microplastics.

Wildlife ingests plastic for a number of reasons most commonly mistaking it for their usual food source.

It is hazardous because it:

- Fills up their guts making them unable to digest real food
- Causes internal damage - sharp plastic can perforate the birds internally.
- And contains high levels of poisons. The relatively large surface area of microplastics collects chemicals from the ocean - particularly heavy metals like mercury and lead.

AUSMAP is a unique collaboration of school students, environment groups, universities and educators.

It gathers critical new data about microplastic in our waterways to enable communities and government to implement behaviour change, regulate industry, and develop better waste management systems.

Information contributed from Phillip Island will add to the growing national database and help to reduce their input into the ocean by identifying the



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Phillip Island Nature Parks' Graham Burgan is pictured at a training workshop conducted by the Australasian Microplastic Measurement Project (AUSMAP) to measure the spread of microplastics on Phillip Island.

source of the materials.

We can all help to reduce this problem by using alternatives to single-use plastics and working towards becoming plastic-free in our daily lives.