

Photo feature – The devastating scale of waste in the oceans

Caroline Power

About the photographer

Caroline has lived on Roatán, the largest of Honduras's Bay Islands, for over a decade. As well as being a photographer, she is a long-time volunteer with the Roatán Marine Park.

This feature presents a series of photos taken on and under the sea surrounding Roatán, an island in the Caribbean Sea off Honduras, as well as shots taken on the island itself. The photos dramatically highlight the scale of the problem of waste in the oceans. This, Caroline notes, is a universal problem for which every country on the planet has some responsibility.

Citation

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Keywords

Sustainability; water



“The trash collects on tide and current lines. Typically, these lines are where mats of sargassum form. This is a type of open-ocean seaweed that provides a crucial habitat for juvenile fish and turtles...”





“... Much of the trash is made up of small pieces of plastic and styrofoam that has been broken up by wind and waves...”

“... There is also a seemingly infinite amount of plastic cutlery, plates and drinks bottles. I've seen old soccer balls, countless shoes and even a TV...”





“... Municipal dumps on Roatán are overflowing. There was an ordinance passed over a decade ago banning plastic bags and limiting the import of plastic bottles, but the current administration refuses to enforce it. Much of the trash we see comes out of the Motagua River and other rivers in Guatemala and Honduras; however, they are not the only source. Every country on the planet has responsibility for this global crisis...”



“... Trash accumulates not just in the ocean but in creek beds and mangroves too...”





“... This is so much more than just a human issue. For me, it’s about wanting to protect aquatic ecosystems for the benefit of all life.”

Plastic among squid eggs



Thoughts from Caroline on the role of individuals' choices in helping solve the crisis...

A key part of the solution to this global crisis is for individuals to make changes to reduce consumption and waste production. There are lots of things that are simple to do. I keep a fork and a reusable container in my bag if I think I might go out to eat. I drink from a reusable water bottle and have cut out all drinks that come in plastic bottles. I always tell bartenders, "No straw." I bring my own bags for shopping and avoid zip-locks bags and plastic wrap. Instead, I keep glass jars and use them for everything. I also love shopping at thrift stores. And before I buy something, I always stop and think whether I really need it.

For the things I have to buy, I look for options which have the least packaging (e.g. shampoo in bar form) and are from ethically responsible companies. Finally, I'm aware that recycling is far from a perfect solution. Instead, I refuse, reduce, reuse and recycle – in that order.

...And on what else can be done...

- 1 Improved environmental education in schools, community centres, businesses and places of worship.
- 2 The passing of laws by governments that ban the sale of single-use plastic and styrofoam products.
- 3 Improved waste-management infrastructure (many countries and cities have experienced such massive population growth, they cannot cope with their waste).
- 4 An increase in the 'eco-friendliness' of businesses and corporations (this is something we can encourage in choosing which businesses we support).
- 5 Increased financial support for local charities and non-governmental organizations that are working to solve the crisis.

...And on that note

Caroline kindly waived the fee for us to use her photos but is always encouraging donations to Roatán Marine Park. You can read about the work of this organization here: <https://www.roatanmarinepark.org/our-work>. And you can donate here: <https://www.roatanmarinepark.org/donate>.