



PRESS RELEASE

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Seabirds killed by plastic

A Northern Gannet which was found unwell on the shoreline near Waterport Terrace earlier this week, did not recover, despite the best efforts of the Department of the Environment's Environmental Protection and Research Unit, the rehabilitation unit of the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) and of the Gibraltar Veterinary Clinic (GVC).

GVC's Veterinarian, Dr Mark Pizarro, carried out a post-mortem examination on the bird. The results showed plastic lodged in the gut, preventing the ingestion of fish, which will have therefore caused its death.

Northern Gannets nest on coastal cliffs in the British Isles and elsewhere in Northern Europe and migrate south for the winter, many spending the colder season in the Mediterranean. At this time they are common around our shores and can be seen diving into the sea from considerable height in search of fish. The plastic found inside the Gannet was in the form of a single wrapper of Marie biscuits, which probably shimmered in the water, making the Gannet think it was a fish.

It cannot be determined where this bird, an adult, ingested the plastic. It could have been anywhere between its nesting sites in the north and its winter quarters, but the message is the same wherever it happened. Plastic in the Environment will cause death.

This is the second gannet in less than a week to die because of plastic – the first was entangled in plastic tape and rope. Also very recently, a rare visitor to Gibraltar, a Purple Sandpiper, was rescued from the shore entangled in netting. Once again, despite best efforts, the bird died.

The Department of the Environment and Climate Change urges everyone to heed calls for reduction in the use of plastic and to recycle all plastic that is used. The Department is finalising legislation on plastics, and is engaging with the construction industry with a view to reducing single-use plastic in that sector.

Minister for the Environment and Climate Change John Cortes commented, *"Having watched these magnificent birds around our shores ever since I was a child, and having had the privilege of seeing them in*

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nesting colonies in the Channel Islands, the tragic death of this Gannet saddens me greatly. And it angers me to know that it has died due to the direct effect of my own species. We are responsible for so much harm to our wildlife.

As a community we must reduce the use of plastic and recycle what we use. We know what we have to do. Government will be publishing laws about this soon and, together with NGOs will continue to campaign. But we don't need laws to know what we have to do."

Dr Keith Bensusan of GONHS stated, "This latest incident is another example of the very damaging and often lethal effect that plastic pollution has on wildlife. It follows on from other examples of birds that have been injured or killed by discarded plastic around Gibraltar's shores in the last few months.

"Over 80% of the world's seabirds have ingested plastic. It is estimated that before the middle of the century, virtually all seabirds will carry some plastic inside them. This is another terrible environmental legacy for humans to leave. We can do something about it by using less plastic and recycling more, and by not littering. If you care about the environment, you should make every effort to do this."

Janet Howitt of the Environmental Safety Group (ESG), said, "News of the recent Gannet's death is terribly sad but not a surprise. The dangers of litter on our living environment has been a catalyst of our Clean up Campaign since 2005 which has worked to both highlight and reduce the threat of litter locally. Global statistics confirm the ever growing and devastating threat posed by plastics in all forms, on our marine world and on seabirds, indeed right down to the food chain and we all need to do more, and quickly. We can all do more to help reverse the damaging plastic war on nature.

Reducing waste and improving legislation on eliminating all forms of single use plastics are targets we have to make a priority."

Lewis Stagnetto of The Nautilus Project commented, "It is with sadness that The Nautilus Project receive the news of the death of a second Northern Gannet, less than a week apart from the previous one. Both deaths are plastic related, ingestion and entanglement respectively, and it is likely that more occurrences will follow throughout the remainder of the year. This is why we need to reduce single use plastic urgently.

"As part of the global food web it is inevitable that the plastic we are discarding as waste, ends up within the food chain and ultimately in us. In June, a paper published in the Journal of Maturitas by Waring et al (2018), highlights various pathways for plastic nanoparticles entering humans.

"The Nautilus Project have been calling for the reduction in single use plastic since October 2016, almost three years now. We welcome the amazing response from the community and businesses but especially from our children.

"The upcoming generations are leading the way on this issue as they seem to understand what is at stake very well. It is inherent we all heed this call and continue to push for the required changes in our lives to reduce single use plastic and the damage it is doing to our planet and to us.

"In the words of Wendell Berry 'a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children.'"