

PLASTIC WASTE HURTS GIANT TORTOISES ON THE GALAPAGOS ARCHIPELAGO



Charles Darwin would probably turn over in his grave. On the Galapagos Archipelago, which served as the central field of study for the British naturalist's theory of evolution in the mid-19th century, more and more plastic and other garbage residues are being found in the feces of rare giant tortoises and other animals.

According to a recent study published in the journal "Environmental Pollution," researchers from various institutions, including the Charles Darwin Foundation, Catholic University of Ecuador, Saint Louis Zoo, and Spanish and Australian universities, have analyzed over 5,500 turtle excreta samples from areas of the archipelago where giant tortoises are exposed to human activities. They have also examined more than 1,000 samples from protected national park zones.

The population of the Galapagos Islands is Growing

The researchers discovered that while almost no residues were found in the national park turtles, the feces of animals from densely populated and economically used areas contained increased levels of plastic residues. This has also affected endangered species like the Western Santa Cruz giant tortoises on Santa Cruz, the most populated island in the Galapagos. A road runs across the island from the airport on the small island of Baltra to the largest town in the archipelago - Puerto Ayora.

The population of the Galapagos Islands has been rapidly increasing over the years. In 1972, a census showed a population of 3,488. By the 1980s, this number had risen to over 15,000, and by 2010, more than 25,000 people lived on the Galapagos Islands. Today, the population is estimated to be over 40,000. This increase is attributed to the rise in tourism, with around 200,000 tourists visiting the archipelago last year.

The pressure on the unique flora and fauna of the archipelago is increasing due to the island's settlements. In the past, foreign small animals like dogs and cats, as well as microscopic invaders like parasites and pathogens, have reached the islands, posing a threat to the native wildlife. However, plastic waste is becoming a more serious threat to the ecosystem. Plastics take a long time to decompose and harm animals before they disappear, causing injuries, intestinal obstructions, and even hormonal changes.

The study's authors conclude that there is an environmental problem in populated areas, and it's crucial to have protected areas to ensure the survival of endangered species.

Single-use plastic items are already prohibited

The Galapagos Islands have implemented regulations to prevent plastic waste. These include banning single-use plastic items such as plastic bags and straws since 2015. Additionally, various campaigns have been launched to raise awareness among the local population about the negative impact of plastic waste on the environment.

In 1959, on the 100th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's groundbreaking theory, the government of Ecuador declared 97.5% of the land area of the archipelago a national park, except for the areas already settled. Later on, extensive marine reserves were also added. The Ecuadorian

government and Credit Suisse agreed on the largest debt-for-nature swap in May of this year. As part of this agreement, the major Swiss bank bought back Ecuadorian government bonds with a nominal value of 1.6 billion dollars. Ecuador is investing the funds released by the buyback to protect the island archipelago.

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