



## Beach clean highlights rubbish issue

Marine litter is a major conservation concern in the world's oceans. In addition to recording sightings of whales and dolphins, the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) also records sightings of drifting litter in the waters off the west coast of Scotland. A density estimate based on research in 2006 was that there were almost 5 pieces of litter per square km in the waters of the Hebrides. This was only litter which could be seen at the surface; there is no way of quantifying the total volume in the water column. So how can we help combat the issue?

Last September, the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust were joined by Lochdonhead Primary school children, and staff for a beach clean at Lochbuie, Isle of Mull, as part of Beachwatch 2007. This was the 15<sup>th</sup> Beachwatch survey, an event coordinated by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS). The event spans the entire coast of Britain and sees enthusiastic volunteers help clear as much as litter as possible off our beaches. The Beachwatch survey uses the information collected to identify the main causes of beach litter and campaign against some of the most common and dangerous litter items.



Plastic was the biggest culprit; according to the MCS, 1198 plastic items per km of beach surveyed were collected, the highest ever recorded in a Beachwatch survey. 85.3% of the rubbish collected at Lochbuie was plastic-based. By helping remove this litter from the beach we can stop it escaping back to the sea on a high tide. Susannah Calderan, HWDT's Biodiversity Officer, said *"Plastics are problematic and have become ubiquitous in the world's oceans over the past 50 years. They are generally buoyant and very slow to degrade. They are easily ingested by marine species and seabirds, and may have unquantifiable long-term impacts. Beach cleans are a great way of getting rid of rubbish, but it's even better to reduce our use of plastics in the first place, so they never have a chance to get into the sea"*.

The Beachwatch 2007 summary report is now available from the MCS. The full report can be downloaded at [www.msck.org](http://www.msck.org). HWDT would like to thank pupils and staff at Lochdonhead Primary School who participated and donated their time and effort to what is a very good cause. HWDT will be taking part in MCS Beachwatch 2008 on September 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. Details of the location have not yet been finalised but if you wish to clean your own stretch of beach please contact MCS on 01989 567807.

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