

Animals

Whales keep eating plastic and dying. This one's stomach had 88 pounds of calcifying trash.

By Deanna Paul**March 18 at 2:54 PM**

By the time Marine biologist Darrell Blatchley arrived at the fishing village Saturday, the young Cuvier's beaked whale was already floating, dead in the water, its eyes sunken and ribs protruding through its skin. The current off the southern Philippine island of Mindanao had washed away the blood it vomited before its death.

He already knew how the 15-foot-long whale had died.

"I knew this whale had died due to plastic ingestion," Blatchley, president and founder of the D' Bone Collector Museum, told The Washington Post, noting that the animal showed telltale signs of dehydration and emaciation. "I was not prepared for the amount of plastic."

The autopsy he conducted revealed more than 88 pounds of waste in the young whale's stomach — grocery bags, plastic garbage bags, four banana plantation sacks and 16 rice sacks.

"It was so bad the plastic was beginning calcification," he said. "The plastic had been there a long time. The stomach was trying to absorb it any way possible."

Lindsay Mosher, Oceanic Society's Blue Habits project manager, said in an email to The Post that "this whale's tragic death by plastic is an important wake-up call to the fact that we can and must do more to stop ocean plastic pollution."

Over the past decade, D' Bone Collector Museum has recovered 57 whales and dolphins that have died after consuming plastic garbage and fishing nets, of which four were pregnant. Blatchley said the amount inside the young Cuvier's beaked whale was the "[most plastic](#)" he has ever seen in a whale.

"This cannot continue," Blatchley said, noting the Philippines ranks as the second most plastic-polluted country in the world. Cetaceans — marine mammals including whales, dolphins and porpoises — do not drink ocean water but absorb fresh water through their food, he explained.

[National Geographic](#) reported that more than 30 whales with plastic debris in their bellies washed up on European beaches in 2016. Since then, plastic trash has been [discovered increasingly](#) in the stomachs of dead seabirds and whales.

A [2017 study](#) predicted a spike in plastic-related waste over the next decade, further highlighting potential future harm to marine life.

Last April, a [male sperm whale](#) beached off the coast of Spain with 64 pounds of trash bags and garbage in its digestive system. A month later, a [pilot whale swallowed](#) 17 pounds of plastic bags in Thai waters.

“If you have 80 plastic bags in your stomach, you die,” marine biologist Thon Thamrongnawasawat [told](#) Agence France-Presse at the time, adding that the plastic probably prevented the whale from digesting food.

Alex Horton contributed to this report.