

Our plastic filled oceans



Plastic debris has some uses! © Louise Johnson

Ocean Cruising Club members will know from personal experience just how much plastic rubbish there is in the world's oceans. Scarcely a day at sea goes by without seeing floating debris, and it can be extremely distressing to arrive at some remote island paradise and find the shoreline is not pristine, but brightly coloured with plastic junk.

And it's not only unpleasant to look at. The effects on wildlife are appalling; marine turtles that mistake plastic bags for their favoured prey, jellyfish, clogging their guts, albatross chicks fed plastic morsels by unwitting parents and baleen whales that ingest plastic debris as they skim feed at the surface – it's an awful legacy, and it is getting worse. Scientists are now showing that as the plastic eventually breaks down into micro particles it enters the entire marine food web – and that should worry us all.

5 Gyres is a yacht based project that is seeking to do something about the amount of plastics in the oceans. Expeditions are designed to visit the vast ocean gyres where much of the plastic debris in the seas eventually gathers, and samples are taken using specially designed trawls. The samples are then analysed to assess their composition and origin. These data are then used to support campaigns aimed at reducing the amount of plastic packaging entering the world's oceans.

There are opportunities to [join one of their expeditions](#) as a paying crew member, or they can [lend some of their equipment](#) to selected vessels that will be traversing one of the five ocean gyres. The trawls come with basic instructions for how to collect and store the samples, for subsequent analysis at 5 Gyres.

OCC member and Jester award winner Matt Rutherford is collaborating with the 5 Gyres team, and [conducted his own voyage to the Atlantic Gyre](#) in 2013 to take samples. 5 Gyres would welcome OCC members who would like to participate, and join the growing navy of citizen scientists who are working to help protect our oceans.