

OUR LITTERED LAND

In our busy, hasty lives, we don't think twice before we drop our chewing gum or our cigarette butts. There's no harm it can do when it's just going to stay there forever, right? However, these seemingly innocuous actions can make a big difference. Litter crawls its way into oceans and lakes, pollutes water, and ultimately, murders marine life. There are many reasons why rubbish is harmful and why we should rethink dropping that one plastic straw and recognise that it is, in fact, a killer.

Across New Zealand, there are multiple nature reserves, each with different and unique aspects. Although these reserves are all distinctive in their own ways, they share one thing in common; they are to be protected. Harbourview-Orangihina Park is a wildlife reserve in Te Atatu that is home to native animal species and is the second largest natural wetland in West Auckland. Beautiful shrubs, mangroves, salt marshes and swamps make up Orangihina, but this beauty is dampened by the ugliness of the elephant in the room, litter. A great percentage of the litter we produce has a high likelihood of ending up in our streams and lakes, and that is exactly what is happening in Orangihina. Local community volunteers such as students from Te Atatu Intermediate and workers from Auckland Council clean up after literers, but the rate at which the parks are trashed is much greater than the amount of people trying to make a change. Little by little, the small quantity of plastic in Orangihina will shape into mammoth amounts. As a rapidly evolving society, we must discontinue use of non-reusable straws and bags before the litter that companies are churning out destroys every reserve near us, and fix the mistakes people from the past made but never predicted would be this serious. When you're taking a stroll in a nature sanctuary, make sure to keep an eye out for and pick up any stray pieces of litter. By doing this and more, we as a country can implement goal 15 ('Life on Land') of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in our everyday lives. You never know if you've just saved an innocent animal or killed one. After all, it's the small things that make the most substantial differences.

Stormwater drains are essential, especially since it rains every so often in New Zealand. Stormwater is the water that runs off impervious surfaces and on occasions, makes its way downhill, towards drains, stormwater pipes, lakes and oceans. Near Orangihina and many urban areas, there are plenty of these drains along the sidewalks, and while they look regular, the magnitude of them are crucial. Stormwater isn't purely rain water. Along the way, stormwater picks up rubbish, oil and other harmful contaminants. The high levels of plant nutrients

found in stormwater can be fatal for fish and other oceanic species. By improving the way we manage stormwater, we can help retain rivers, lakes, wetlands and beaches' cleanliness whilst saving animals.

Pollution and rubbish are major problems, but why should we take special care of especially ones in reserves? And why should we care? A fauna sanctuary's purpose is to preserve specific animals, plants or both. For example, pūkeko, North Island fernbirds, banded rails and many more splendid animals are frequent visitors to Orangihina. But marine creatures inhabiting the lakes are most at risk, with an estimated 80 percent of all negative effects on aquatic animals a result of insensitive littering. Furthermore, reserves are supposed to be a safe environment for all animals in the area, but with literal toxic waste in their waters, there is no way it is as protected as it should be. Plastic is known for its lightweightness which means even if you dispose of it thoughtfully, far away from any wildlife park, it can easily make its way to one, with vulnerable native species living in one. Marine creatures living there can mistake plastic as edible and, consequently, choke to death. If these harsh but very real facts don't convince Kiwis to opt for reusable supermarket bags, there's a strong possibility we will not be bothered to actively help out with larger issues. These are the main reasons why we should take extra steps to implement the basic principle of kaitiakitanga, guardianship and protection, to indirectly save marine life. This has a clear correlation to goal 14 of the United Nations SDG program with the main idea 'Life Below Water', which essentially aims to protect and supervise marine ecosystems from threatening pollution.

Everywhere, on the news, on posters, at school, they tell you to help make a difference. But how? It's not as simple as it seems, but if every New Zealander contributes, our country can hope for a bright, litterless future. Visit local beaches and parks to pick up other people's trash, join rubbish-collecting volunteer groups in your area and prompt your friends and family to be mindful of what type of food packaging they buy. Students from Te Atatu Intermediate, and from the local community, are encouraged to join our Ten-A-Day crusade in picking up litter. There are also many fundraisers on websites for people to clean incorrectly discarded rubbish, however, if you're unable to donate, remind yourself of the SDGs and pitch in on seemingly insignificant but key tasks.

Keeping our world clean and environmentally friendly is our main goal, but we can only do that if we take baby steps. We need to first bring New Zealand's "clean and green" title to life by doing the aforementioned tasks: picking up litter, taking care of marine wildlife and all creatures in general, care for reserves near you, and hope that more people will slow down in their fast-paced days to pick up

the cigarette butt the person in front of them dropped and dispose of their bubble gum correctly. Since ocean microplastic pollution is at least double than previously thought, we need to take action faster than ever to improve the planet and its citizens by 2030, like the UN's Global Goals promise. If you aren't part of the solution, you may as well be part of the pollution.

Links:

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

<https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/environment/looking-after-aucklands-water/stormwater/Pages/how-we-manage-stormwater.aspx>

<https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/environment/looking-after-aucklands-water/Pages/stormwater-and-waterway-projects.aspx>

https://blogs.ntu.edu.sg/hp331-2014-30/?page_id=29#:~:text=Nature%20reserves%20also%20gives%20high,invaluable%20resource%20for%20future%20usage.