

The World's Most Polluted Protected Island Gets Rid of 9 Tons of Plastic Waste



A 2015 analysis (published in 2017) revealed that in South Polynesia, on one of the four islands of the Pitcairn archipelago, Henderson Island, more than 8 tons of plastic washed up on its beaches: «the highest density of plastic debris ever recorded in the world». The 38 km² island has over 38 million pieces of plastic on its shores. Conservative estimates suggest that 3,500 to 13,500 new plastic items wash up on Henderson every day.

AN IMPOSSIBLE CLEANUP

In 2019, an expedition attempted to clean up this isolated sanctuary. 6 tons of garbage were collected on the beach to the east of the island. Unfortunately, blocked by waves breaking on the coral reef that protects the island, the team was unable to remove the big bags filled with waste and was forced to abandon them on site. The major challenge in removing the waste from Henderson Island is therefore to cross the coral reef without damaging it. A difficult step because of the rocks and waves blocking access to the beach. Extracting the waste using conventional means is therefore impossible, and requires inventing new solutions that can be replicated in other polluted areas that are difficult to access. 5 years after this unsuccessful attempt, Plastic Odyssey decided to tackle this impossible mission.

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

After months of preparation, the Plastic Odyssey teams arrived on Henderson Island on February 12, 2024 and succeeded, thanks to innovative low-tech solutions, in cleaning up the beach designated as the most polluted in the world. The plastic waste was recycled and transformed into street furniture for the neighboring island of Pitcairn.

LOW-TECH SOLUTIONS

To solve the problem of waste disposal without damaging the coral reef, several innovative systems have been used:

- **the raft:** when the weather is favorable, a raft is used to transport the big-bags to the ship.
- **the parachute:** when the waves are too strong, an ascending parachute system evacuates the waste above the water.

RESULTS IN FIGURES

7 days and 25 people mobilized to clean up, evacuate and recycle waste

- 6,000 kilos of plastic waste from 2019, confined in stale bags above the high tide line, were successfully evacuated.
- The beach was cleaned of new garbage stranded since 2019. An additional 3,000 kilos were collected and disposed of bringing the total mass of waste disposed of to over 9 tons.
- The recycling of plastics into useful objects was carried out with Pitcairn residents, using on-board machinery aboard the Plastic Odyssey floating laboratory.
- Scientific data have been collected to better understand the impact of plastic pollution.

28 days mission in the Pacific Ocean to reach this isolated island

25 explorers, scientists, ornithologists, sailors and recycling specialists

1500 buoys removed from the island in a garland over 750 meters long

56 Big Bags filled with 100 to 140 Kg of waste removed from the island

9,3 tons of plastic collected and sorted on site to facilitate recycling

2,3 tons of plastic recycled on site thanks to the Plastic Odyssey ship and its onboard workshop

8 street furniture made from Henderson Island waste installed on Pitcairn

1 scientific study made on site

RELIVE THE EXPEDITION

Discover the Expedition 2024
Henderson Island website

VISIT





À PROPOS DE PLASTIC ODYSSEY

Plastic Odyssey is a 3-year international expedition dedicated to solving the urgent problem of plastic pollution in our oceans. Its mission is driven by the urgent need to protect marine ecosystems and raise global awareness of the devastating impact of plastic waste. Plastic Odyssey's multifaceted approach is to demonstrate innovative methods for transforming collected plastic into valuable materials.

More information on www.plasticodyssey.org

Plastic Odyssey corporate partners include L'Occitane en Provence, Après-Demain, Crédit Agricole, Clarins and Matmut. A full list of partners is available [here](#).

CONTACT

Press and media partnerships

Photo reports, video content, or interview requests should be addressed to press@plasticodyssey.org

Partnerships

For partnership inquiries, please write to us at partnerships@plasticodyssey.org



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