

'FOREIGN' PLASTIC INVADES GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Pollution - Air, Water, Soil & E-waste

The pristine beaches of the Great Nicobar Island, India's southernmost territory, are under threat from plastic. A survey of five beaches in the islands recorded the presence of plastic bottles.

Sixty of these were analysed and found to be of 'non-Indian origin,' according to researchers, whose findings appear in the latest edition of *Current Science*.

"Major portion of the litter (40.5%) was of Malaysian origin. It was followed by Indonesia (23.9%) and Thailand (16.3%). Other countries contributed a minor portion," researchers Biraja Kumar Sahu and B. Baskar note in their study.

The litter of Indian origin only amounted to 2.2%, they said.

Mr. Sahu is affiliated to the CSIR-Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology and Mr. Baskar to the Mayo Clinic, Rochester in Minnesota, USA.

About 10 countries including India contributed to the plastic litter in the island.

They were Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, India, Myanmar, China and Japan.

Proximity to island

The overwhelming contribution from Indonesia and Thailand was likely due to its proximity to the island; the plastic is likely to have made its way to the island because of water currents via the Malacca Strait, which is a major shipping route.

"The huge quantities of marine debris observed on this island might be due to improper handling of the solid waste from fishing/mariculture activity and ship traffic," the researchers note.

Strain of tourism

However, the researchers also point out that litter of Indian origin on beaches and mangroves of the Andaman Islands is continuously increasing.

This is probably due to lack of proper guidelines and inadequate staff to monitor these islands, they said.

The Great Nicobar Island of Andaman has an area of about 1044 sq. km.

According to the 2011 census, has a population of about 8,069.

The island is home to one of the most primitive tribes of India — the Shompens.

The island includes the Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve (GNBR) comprising of the Galathea National Park and the Campbell Bay National Park.

The island harbours a wide spectrum of ecosystems from tropical wet evergreen forests, mountain ranges and coastal plains.

The island is also home to giant robber crabs, crab-eating macaques, the rare megapode as well as leatherback turtles.

Biggest threat

Plastic pollution has emerged as one of the severest threats to ocean ecosystems and its concentration has reached 5,80,000 pieces per square kilometre.

Plastic represents 83% of the marine litter found.

The remaining 17% is mainly textiles, paper, metal and wood.

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