

THE GREEN LEAF

Plastic eaten by seabirds causes distant problems

[By Nina Wu](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Sep 09, 2013



COURTESY DAVID HYRENBACH

A plastic comb pulled out of an albatross' stomach from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Litter has a long-distance impact. We're talking about everyday human litter like plastic bottle caps and cigarette lighters, which birds can swallow, carrying them great distances.

Seabird expert David Hyrenbach has pulled many such plastic items, including a plastic comb, out of the stomachs of Laysan albatross and black-footed albatross chicks from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

What's alarming is that he's found plastic every time he's looked in the albatrosses' stomachs.

"Plastic lasts for a long, long time," said Hyrenbach, an assistant professor of oceanography at Hawaii Pacific University. "The ocean currents and wind move the material around. On top of that, birds go very, very far. These dynamics combine to create a huge dilemma."

A piece of plastic ingested in Hawaii, he observed, could end up in a dead bird thousands of miles away.

SCIENCE PUB-HAWAII

» **When:** 6 p.m. Sept. 16

Hyrenbach will share his insights on marine life and pollutants at the debut of Science Pub-Hawaii at 6 p.m. Sept. 16 at Gordon Biersch in Aloha Tower Marketplace.

» **Where:** Gordon Biersch, Aloha Tower Marketplace

» **Cost:** Free

His lecture, titled "Wings Without Borders: Using Seabirds to Track Ocean Plastic Pollution," will focus on the long-distance impact of litter.

» **Info:** www.hpu.edu/sciencepub-hawaii

"Plastic ingestion by seabirds is a serious concern because it is a pervasive issue that affects many species throughout the North Pacific (and the globe)," said Hyrenbach via email while conducting field research. "Moreover, it raises other issues relating to plastic entering marine food webs."

In addition to albatrosses, Hyrenbach said Tristram's storm-petrels in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and wedge-tailed shearwater chicks on Oahu are ingesting plastic.

Sponsored by HPU, Science Pub-Hawaii is an informal showcase of leading experts in science and technology.

It will be held the third Monday of every month, with no-host food and beverages. There is no charge to attend, and no RSVP is necessary.

"We've got a very deep, very experienced faculty here that have a wide amount of knowledge from a wide range of disciplines," said HPU spokesman Chris Aguinaldo. "We hope to get these researchers and scientists in front of the general public."

The discussions are meant to be interactive and informal for both nonscientists and science geeks alike. Similar events on the mainland have proved to be popular.

The whole idea is to bring science out of a lecture hall and into the community.

HPU describes Science Pub-Hawaii as "an informal showcase of research and scholarship for people who like to learn and discuss timely scientific topics."

It sounds like a great idea. Bring your appetite for learning.

Nina Wu writes about environmental issues. Reach her at 529-4892 or nwu@staradvertiser.com.