



Parque Nacional  
**GALÁPAGOS**  
Ecuador



**Galapagos**  
Conservation Trust



## New report reveals unfair burden of plastic pollution on the Galapagos Islands



*Beach plastic clean-up in Galapagos © Conservation International / GNPD*

**A landmark new report released by the Galapagos National Park Directorate and Galapagos Conservation Trust presents the most detailed picture to date of the threat that coastal plastic pollution poses to the Galapagos Islands.**

The 40-page report is the result of a collaborative effort between dozens of organisations, researchers, businesses and governmental bodies across the Eastern Pacific region, and covers the current state of knowledge on the international plastic footprint affecting Galapagos, highlighting oceanic inputs and the impacts on wildlife and communities. At least 52 different species<sup>1</sup> in Galapagos, both on land and in the sea, have been found to be entangled in plastic, living in affected habitats or having ingested plastic after mistaking it for food. This includes iconic endemic species such as the Galapagos giant tortoise, the marine iguana and the waved albatross.

The report also shows that:

- **69% of plastics found on Galapagos coastlines are single-use items**  
Drinks bottles are the most common item recorded, accounting for at least a third of all items found<sup>2</sup>, and 28% of these are water bottles.
- **Just 4 companies account for over half of the branded plastic items found on Galapagos coastlines**  
In an analysis of over 450 branded plastic items collected on Galapagos beaches, 53.22% came from just four companies: **AjeGroup** (20%), **Coca-Cola** (18.2%), **Tingyi Holding Corp.** (8.8%) and **Pepsico** (6.2%)<sup>1</sup>.
- **At least 40% of the plastic pollution in Galapagos is from maritime sources - double the global average**  
Oceanographic modelling reveals that most of this plastic waste originates from fishing fleets operating near the Galapagos Marine Reserve, and then accumulates on east-facing beaches.
- **25% of plastic bottles washing up in Galapagos are Chinese in origin**  
These bottles are often found in near-pristine condition, supporting the theory that the drinks are being consumed on board international fishing vessels then disposed of at sea, where they are picked up by ocean currents and carried into the Galapagos Marine Reserve.

Island communities such as Galapagos are increasingly bearing the brunt of plastic litter arriving from external sources and accumulating along coastlines. This influx of pollution is constant, and communities are burdened with costly clean-ups that put more pressure on over-burdened waste management systems. The main sites where plastic accumulates in Galapagos are difficult to access, away from areas seen by tourists, which makes clean-up efforts even more challenging.

"In some ways, the Galapagos Islands have barely changed since Charles Darwin visited in 1835, but the rising tide of plastic accumulating on the Archipelago's remote shores has been disturbing to witness," commented Dr Jen Jones, CEO of Galapagos Conservation Trust. "We are calling on world leaders to agree an ambitious, legally-binding Global Plastics Treaty that bans single-use plastics and strengthens laws on waste management at sea. The companies and countries responsible for creating plastic pollution must be held accountable, and the island communities on the receiving end urgently need financial and technical support."

**Download the full report here:**

<https://galapagosconservation.org.uk/galapagos-plastic-pollution-report-2024/>

### NOTES TO EDITORS:

Galapagos Conservation Trust (GCT) is the only UK charity to focus exclusively on the conservation and sustainable development of the Galapagos Archipelago.

GCT launched the Plastic Pollution Free Galapagos programme in May 2018 to support the Galapagos National Park Directorate, Galapagos Governing Council and the local community in tackling plastic pollution in Galapagos. Research carried out by GCT and partners has focused on three key areas:

- the sources of plastic pollution in Galapagos
- the effects of plastic pollution (both on local ecosystems and on related economic activity)
- the potential solutions to tackling plastic pollution

The Pacific Plastics: Science to Solutions (PPSS) network, co-led by GCT and the University of Exeter, brings together researchers, NGOs, governments and businesses across the Eastern Tropical Pacific region to gather evidence and provide the Galapagos National Park Directorate (GNPD) with advice and recommendations on the management of plastic pollution.

The GNPD and partners undertake an annual coastal clean-up campaign, supported by community action. Funding for clean-ups is urgently needed to prevent coastal plastic from breaking down into harmful microplastics and entering the ecosystem.

GCT and the PPSS network are supporting the GNPD in the design of a management plan for marine plastic pollution, informed by the evidence in this report, to maximise the effectiveness of clean-ups and ensure they prioritise the worst affected areas. This evidence also allows us to move towards long-term solutions to reduce the amount of plastic entering the Galapagos Marine Reserve.

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<sup>1</sup> Muñoz-Pérez, J.P., Lewbart, G.A., Alarcón-Ruales, D., Skehel, A., Cobos, E., Rivera, R., Jaramillo, A., Vivanco, H., Zurita-Arthos, L., Wallace, B., Valle, C.A., Townsend, K.A. (2023). Galápagos and the Plastic Problem. *Frontiers in Sustainability*, Volume 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsus.2023.1091516>

<sup>2</sup> Jones, J., Porter, A., Muñoz-Pérez, J.P., Alarcón-Ruales, D., Galloway, T.S., Godley, B.J., Santillo, D., Vagg, J., Lewis, C. (2021). Plastic contamination of a Galapagos Island (Ecuador) and the relative risks to native marine species. *Science of the Total Environment*, Volume 789. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2021.147704>