

Marine debris event on Alphonse

07-April-2014

On the morning of March 17, 2014, 209 woven plastic sacks were discovered at point Tamatave on Alphonse island.

This was quite an incredible amount of debris to have washed up in a single night. The sacks all appeared to be new and unused, which leads me to conclude that they must have come from a whole stack of new sacks. Perhaps a pallet of them fell off a ship, who knows. What I do know is that they will have a big impact on wildlife as there must be a lot more floating in the sea besides the 209 found on the beach.

When these bags start to break down in the salt water and intense sunlight, they come apart and the plastic material that they are made of gets very easily entangled around animals. I have seen a Red Footed booby with sack material wrapped round its leg, the material then got wrapped round a tree branch and the booby was unable to free itself and eventually died.

Two dead yellow bellied sea snakes *Pelamis platura* were found dead on the beach of St Francois and Alphonse on the same day these sacks washed up. I don't believe that this is a coincidence. These snakes are very rarely seen near islands, so for two to be seen on the same day is incredible. I think they must have gotten caught up in this drift of sacks, and killed.

The one silver lining of this story is that most of the sacks are still good and once they've been dried ICS will use them to collect more rubbish off the beaches of Alphonse.

By Sam Balderson

Island Conservation (Alphonse)



