

What Lies Beneath Geordie Bay?



It's our ocean's equivalent of a horror movie: everything appears nice and clean from the surface, but when you took a look at what lies beneath, well, it's enough to scare any marine enthusiast. Sadly, but probably not surprisingly, the heavily trafficked areas around Rottnest Island are some of the most deceptive. Geordie Bay on the north side of Rottnest looks clean enough, but when members of the Underwater Explorers Club of WA (UEC) undertook a clean up for the Rottnest Island Authority last February, the amount of rubbish they retrieved from the ocean floor was staggering. Empty beer bottles, cans, bait baskets and rope were among the 125kg of rubbish that made up this scary scene.

With three support crew working from the Club's boat, the Underwater Explorer, seventeen UEC divers spent up to 75 minutes collecting rubbish from Geordie Bay's floor. Diving in buddy pairs, the Club members scoured the area with bags and special gloves to collect whatever was lurking under the surface.

However, because some items are often recycled by the locals and turned into handy homes for fish, octopus and other marine life, not all the rubbish was

collected. If for example a bottle was more than fifty percent inhabited, it was left to become part of the Rottnest marine ecosystem. Nevertheless, most rubbish was brought to the surface.

Glass bottles were the main villains, accounting for about 96% of the total weight of rubbish collected by the divers. Plastic is another major hazard for marine life; fish, turtles and other sea creatures can mistake plastic bags for food and choke on them.

With hundreds of magnificent dive sites and an abundance of marine species around Rottnest, the UEC often dive close to the island. Contributing to its cleanliness is therefore a Club priority.

"It's important to conserve the beauty of Rotto for next generations," says Club member and clean-up diver, Phil Doring, who has been diving for almost fourteen years. "We're getting the pleasure out of diving so it's nice to give something back. Or take something away, as this case goes!"

Like most of the other 200 UEC members, Phil is deeply committed to conservation of marine animals and the marine environment. "I'm glad we can help clean up the rubbish, but there shouldn't be any in the first place. I'm very concerned about the alarming rate we're degrading our marine environment and we should do whatever we can to look after it."

Rottnest Island Authority's Senior Environmental Officer, Harriet Davie, agrees. She said the underwater cleanup of Geordie Bay was a great success.

"Hopefully this will become a yearly event and enable us to monitor what is being discarded overboard, as well as make boaties more aware and responsible for their rubbish," Harriet said.

Because Geordie Bay is heavily used by boaties and other visitors, an accumulation of rubbish is inevitable. But users are urged to exercise more care by taking their rubbish with them or putting it in the many bins provided by the Authority. Refuse fouls the water, kills marine life and injures people using the bay.

By publicly acknowledging its regular participation in clean ups, the UEC hope that their actions will set an example for other marine users, and that the waters around Rottnest don't become another horror story.

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