

# Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION  
OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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**Notes:** Eighteen bottle caps is my unofficial count. It's hard to tell from the picture. You can count them yourself if you want to. Search the Web for "A Story About Albatross," posted by a group called Oikonos. The picture is on page 11. FYI, it shows what was left after the chick had been dead awhile. (Not super gross. Just bones, feathers and ... plastic.) Ohio, my home, doesn't have any oceans. ("Oh, so you noticed.") But it has a great Great Lake, Lake Erie. And it has a great place to study it, Stone Lab, which is part of the university that keeps me in leaves, Ohio State. You can take a field trip there with your science club at school. You can study there later in high school and in college. Check out <http://stonelab.osu.edu/>.

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**Q. Dear Twig: What does that mean, "Blech, nurdles"?**

A. It means that **marine animals sometimes eat nurdles** — plastic pellets — and **scientists say it can hurt them**. The animals mistake the nurdles for something good to eat, like fish eggs.

**Q. Blech ... alicious.**

A. Yes ... what? Marine animals eat other plastic trash, too, by mistake, often more of it than nurdles. Seabirds called albatrosses mistake shiny plastic trash bits for fish, snatch them and swallow them whole. Leatherback sea turtles confuse plastic bags with jellyfish, a favorite food, and gulp them.

"Ingested plastics may block digestive tracts, damage stomach linings or lessen feeding drives," a report in the *Marine Pollution Bulletin* tells us. That means the stuff can **clog up the animals' insides, make their stomachs hurt, or make them feel full even when they aren't and so they don't eat enough**. Some get sick. Some die.

**Q. I see.**

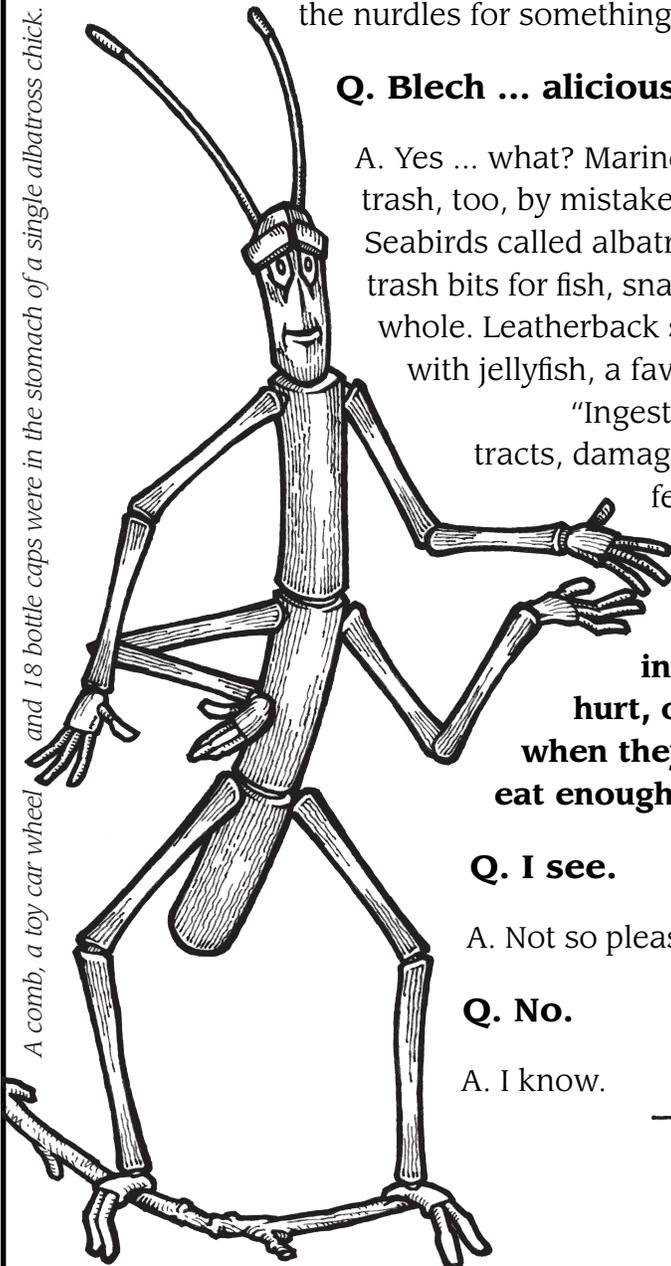
A. Not so pleasant.

**Q. No.**

A. I know.

Twig

A comb, a toy car wheel and 18 bottle caps were in the stomach of a single albatross chick.



From your scientific friends at The Ohio State University — specifically, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center ([www.oardc.ohio-state.edu](http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu)) and OSU Extension ([extension.osu.edu](http://extension.osu.edu)).