

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



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AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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Notes: The link is to "Trashed" by Charles Moore in *Natural History* magazine. Sources also included "Altered Oceans" by Kenneth R. Weiss and Usha Lee McFarling in the *Los Angeles Times*, <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/oceans/la-oceans-series,0,7842752.special>; and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association's Marine Debris Program, <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/>. The North Pacific Gyre occupies 10 million square miles. The pop-bottle figure comes from these calculations: 3 million tons equals 2.7 trillion grams. An empty 1-liter soda bottle weighs about 35 grams. Divide 2.7 trillion by 35 and you get (but might not want) 77 billion empty 1-liter soda bottles.

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Q. Dear Twig: Here's what my friend Steve said at lunch: that there's a great big pile of plastic garbage floating in the middle of the ocean. True?

A.: True. And I'm blue. It's in the northern **Pacific Ocean**. And it's way more than a pile. A scientist says the used-up, thrown-out, built-up plastic spans an area as big as Texas. Another puts the total weight of the floating rubbish at 3 million tons — equal, for example, to 77 billion empty 1-liter soda bottles.

Crud.

People call it several names: the **Pacific Trash Vortex**. The **Great Pacific Garbage Patch**.

It's in a part of the ocean called the **North Pacific Gyre** ("jire"; rhymes with "tire"): a big huge region where the currents spin clockwise. The trash collects in the gyre's calm center.

Why is all this junk a problem? **Fish** get tangled in it. **Seabirds** eat it by accident and it fills up and clogs up their

guts. The plastic breaks down and lets loose **toxic chemicals**, and fish and birds ingest those, too. Plus it looks like ... well, what you don't want to look at.

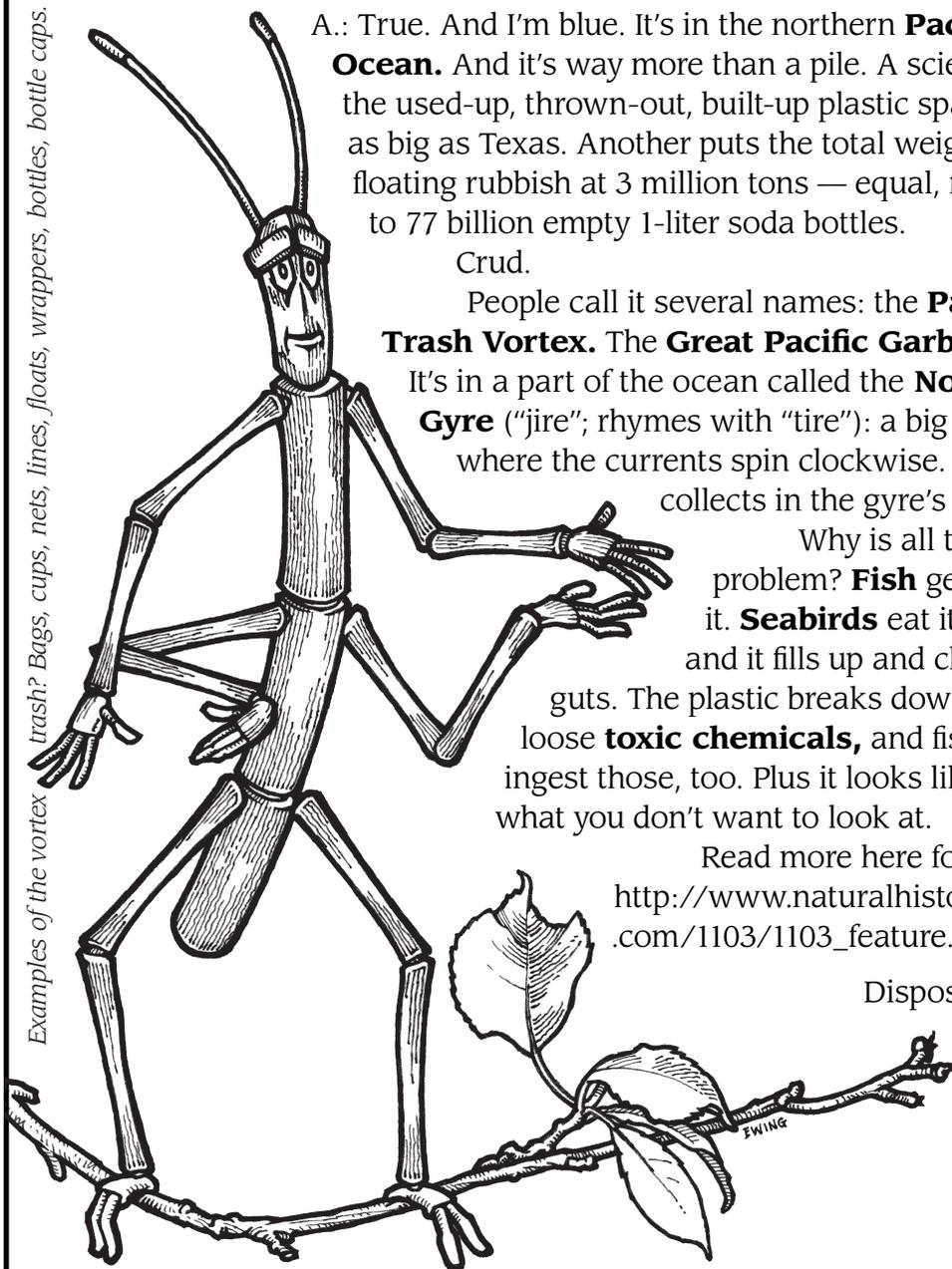
Read more here for starters:

http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/1103/1103_feature.html.

Disposably,

Twig

Examples of the vortex: trash? Bags, cups, nets, lines, floats, wrappers, bottles, bottle caps.



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