

Conservation Corner

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Last week we looked at the stories and challenges of the first four Washed Ashore™ sculptures now on display at the Reimen Gardens located on the ISU campus in Ames. We'll pick up the June 14th Garden Club tour at the Whale Tail in the Campanile Garden. Did you know Humpback Whales swim through every ocean in the world? Growing up to 50 feet long, adults can weigh up to 40 tons. Hunted to the brink of extinction by whalers, the Humpback Whale is one of the most successful comeback stories in the ocean. In order to reduce plastic in our oceans, purchase local products and avoid unnecessary plastic packaging. Time to check out the farmers market!

The patriotic American Sea Star in the Thai Garden was created to bring attention to all the plastics used in Independence Day celebrations. Fireworks along our lakes, rivers, and ocean shores result in thousands of pounds of plastic entering the water. As with any celebration, take time to clean up after this 4th of July.

Outside the Children's Garden, Rufus the Triggerfish featured umbrella handles, flip flops, and toy shovels. Triggerfish use their powerful jaws and sharp teeth to eat urchins, mollusks, and floating plastic pieces. Plastics don't biodegrade and can last for hundreds of years in the environment. Make sure the next gift you give is plastic-free and sustainable.

Greta the Great White Shark lurked beside Lake Helen. Sharks date back over 400 million years ago. Their intelligence and highly refined senses of smell, hearing, touch, taste, sight, and electro-reception have made them one of evolution's greatest success stories. Today, however, due to over-hunting and pollution, their numbers are declining. Every day can be a clean-up day. Every piece of trash picked up and properly disposed of is a piece that will not harm our environments and animals.

Zorabelle the Rockhopper Penguin, with her fetching bulk tank brush eyebrows, caught my eye as well. Rockhopper Penguin populations have been steadily declining over the past century due to marine pollution, loss of food availability, and commercial fishing. We can all help preserve the environment. When vacationing this summer, remember to pack it in and pack it out.

The last sculpture of the morning was SeeMore the Sea Lion Pup. Curious sea lions explore unusual objects with their noses and mouths and easily become caught in rope, nets, packing straps, and other trash. Once entangled, sea lions may live unharmed until they grow and the deadly plastic tightens. Avoid purchasing items encased in durable plastic loops or rings that can entangle wildlife. If you can't avoid plastic loops, cut them before disposing of them.

We headed back to the Hughes Conservatory in time for a walk through the Butterfly Wing and gift shop before heading home. It was a fun day, filled with trash and challenges to clean up our act. The dream of Washed Ashore™ is to run out of art supplies. Will you help their dream come true?

