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Reasons to respect coastal wildlife -- the lost age of innocence

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We were having a lovely sunny day in Pacifica a few years ago. It was a good feeling to see a father and daughter get out of their car and walk to a Pacifica bluff together, with excitement in their strides. I wondered if they had spotted a whale breaching. I parked near their car.

Suddenly, I was shocked to see what the father did. He pulled some old vinyl records out of a bag and started to throw each one like a Frisbee out over the bluff where it splintered into shards and fell -- potentially into the ocean. I asked them to please consider where these pieces would end up. He proceeded to clamber down the bluff with the intention of picking up the vinyl pieces he could find-or so he told me.

Roll forward a few years: I was out walking my dogs at Mussel Rock car park and I saw a golf ball fly over my head and bounce down the bluff. It took me a while to see where it had come from. It was a man standing high up on the Allied Waste bluff practicing his golf swing across the car park. He had a huge box of golf balls. I stopped him, of course.

Then in June 2011, I was again at Mussel Rock car park where I had released my hounds from my car to go and explore the great outdoors.

My dogs' excitement was matched by the shouts from two adolescent boys with a father figure; they were taking it in turns to pitch baseballs and tennis balls, and bat them out to sea from the

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edge of the bluff.

When I challenge these jolly, innocent people, the most cited excuse is that they live close by, as if this is their God-given right! And I am sure it is fun -- until they know what they are doing. I am always polite and mention how baleen whales innocently feed: They open their mouths and take in anything that gets sucked inside. Then they blow out excess water, swallowing solids trapped by their baleen combs. Sadly, this is why whales are dying in agony from plastic bags, buckets, balls and bottles stuck in their stomachs. And the formerly jolly people say "Oh, I didn't think about that."

Other evidence suggests that people are shooting at birds flying over the Mussel Rock car park. Spent cartridges litter the ground. And these cartridges are made of plastic. You see where I am going with this, don't you?

Dropping even a plastic bottle outside in a windy car park has lost its innocence; it presents potential hazards to wildlife here and a world away, especially (but not only), if the site is near to the ocean. As you see, all rivers run into oceans, eventually. All oceans have permanent plastic garbage patches, some twice the size of Texas. Plastic and cigarette butts never leave this planet so there is no away in the innocent statement "just throw it away."

What would you do if you saw someone doing any of these things? I hope you would want to tell others respectfully, why it is a bad idea. But it needs more education to children and also reasoning to an older age group that has surpassed the institutional age, and may have spent their youth enjoying the rule-free mantra of "letting anything go"; and outreach to explain to people the true ramifications of their actions. The age of innocence has just been redefined as the age of learning reason. A 4-year old girl, whose mother was in the Helping Hands Group supporting a Surfrider Foundation clean-up, celebrated her birthday by cleaning up litter at Mussel Rock car park. She understood the reason we clean up litter near to the beach. Four is a very good age to learn reason.

Please join us at our monthly meeting held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Pacifica Library, 104 Hilton Way. The Pacifica Beach Coalition is dedicated to ending litter and preserving coastal habitat and wildlife through advocacy, education, community building, and citizen action.

If you are interested in helping us with our mission, you are warmly invited to join our group. Opportunities to help are numerous and all skills are appreciated.

For more information, please call 355-1668 or email pickituppacifica@gmail.com (<mailto:pickituppacifica@gmail.com>), or visit www.pacificabeachcoalition.org (<http://www.pacificabeachcoalition.org>)

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