

Ocean Threats: Invasive Species

When a foreign organism, plant, or animal finds its way to an existing ecosystem, it is considered an invasive species. Unfortunately, invasive species are increasingly common in the land and water. They sometimes cause devastating effects to existing ecosystems. Scientists estimate about [84 percent of marine regions harbor invasive species](#). Not only are invasive species a threat to marine ecosystems, they also affect the global economy. By disrupting natural habitats, invasives cause billions of dollars of damage every year.

How do Invasives Travel?

Throughout history, invasive species made their way through the oceans hitching a ride on driftwood, coconut shells, and other natural materials floating around the ocean. Sometimes when an invasive species arrives in a new ecosystem, nothing happens. The environment may not be favorable to their survival and they die off. Other times, invasives find a favorable environment with no natural predators. In these cases, invasives multiply quickly and crowd out or devour the native species living there. This impacts the local ecosystem's food chain and all the wildlife living there.

Human behavior significantly increased invasive species travel due to the global shipping industry. Invasive species hitch a ride in large boat's ballasts. These compartments carry large amounts of water to counterbalance the ship's cargo weight. When the ship arrives at its destination, it releases the water and whatever organisms that happen to be inside. Some invasives also attach to a ship's hull.

It is not just the shipping industry giving invasives the opportunity to wreak havoc on natural ecosystems. The millions of tons of trash and plastic floating in the ocean gives invasives plenty opportunities to travel. Pet owners releasing their exotic pets and fish into the ocean and escapees from aquaculture farms also contribute to the invasive crisis.

Common Ocean Invasive Species

Lionfish

Lionfish are the most prolific invasive marine species. They were introduced to South Florida's coast in the mid-1980s and have become a huge threat to the Western Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico. With no natural predators, Lionfish populations feast on massive amounts of native fish a year and reproduce at an alarming rate. Their venomous spines cause extreme pain and swelling if injected.

European Green Crab

These invaders started their ocean takeover in the 1800s most likely from the shipping industry. Today they are prolific in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. These ravenous invasives eat just about anything their size or smaller. They caused a big impact on many local shellfish industries.

Killer Algae

This algae originated from the Indian and Pacific oceans. Its attractive color and hardiness made it popular for aquarium enthusiasts. Unfortunately, those that dumped their aquariums into local waterways helped spread this invasive into the Mediterranean. Since it is toxic to many native herbivores, this algae quickly forms dense meadows crowding out native seagrasses and algae while destroying the food chain of local ecosystems.

To learn more about these invasives and others please check out [this article from the Ocean Conservatory](#).

What can you do?

Removing invasive species from the oceans is a costly, long-term process costing billions of dollars a year. No single person can stop and reverse the damage done by the many dangerous invasive species. There are some things you could do to help stop the spread of invasives and support efforts to remove them from natural areas.

Raise Public Awareness

By educating those around you about ocean invasives and their impact on the environment, you spread the word and prevent others from contributing to this global catastrophe. Donate to groups that help remove these species and encourage others to do so.

Never Dump Pets or Aquariums in the Ocean

When invasives have an opportunity to thrive in an area with no natural predators, they often multiply quickly and crowd out native species. Even if you think little Nemo would be so much happier in the big ocean, resist the urge. Find others willing to take your unwanted pets.

Join Invasive Removing Efforts

If you live in an area affected by invasives, search out a group that is actively trying to remove them. Volunteer some of your time to help the health of the ocean.

Keep Plastic Out of the Ocean

Minimize your use of plastic water bottles and other materials that find their way into the ocean. Recycle whenever possible. Do your part to keep the oceans clean.

Reduce Your Carbon Footprint

Global warming is causing the ocean temperature to rise. This temperature increase gives invasives a chance to survive in areas that were historically uninhabitable for them. By [reducing your carbon footprint](#), you could do your part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Keep Hitchhikers Off Your Boat

If you love being on the water, make sure your boat, paddle board, kayak or other vessel hasn't attracted any mud, plants, or organisms. Clean your boat thoroughly before putting it into another body of water.

The ocean is a precious resource. Let's care for it so future generations could also experience the joys and benefits from it. At Indelible Lifestyles, we sell products that give back to the community and environment. In addition, we donate 1 percent of our profits to various conservation efforts.