

LOCAL HERO

Making sure the coast is clear

Clearing up old crisp packets and smarties lids can be strangely fulfilling, says Emma Sturman of her beach cleaning passion

Emma Sturman loves picking up beach litter – saying it is not only good for the environment, but good for her too (and she gets to add to an unusual collection.)

She lives close to the sea, works for a company designing navigational aids for boats, buoys and offshore platforms and loves scuba-diving, so setting up a beach clean group seemed a natural thing to do.

She had helped at beach cleans organised by Surfers Against Sewage, Sea Shepherd and Dune Runner but wanted to join more regular cleans close to her home in Caister-on-Sea.

In January she created Norfolk Beach Cleans to supply equipment and co-ordinate regular sessions as soon as coronavirus restrictions allowed.

“My main reason behind beach cleaning is to protect what I love which is the ocean, environment and the wildlife,” said Emma. “If the plastic pollution continues to cause destruction to marine life and the ocean ecosystems, the consequences will be devastating for all life on earth.”

“I chose to organise beach cleans to remove litter from the environment but the main thing we need to do is reduce our consumption of single use plastic and this is where the government and larger manufacturers need to take action.”

Over a single month recently 78 people collected a shocking 136kg of litter. Plastic is the most frequently found litter but Emma said; “It depends which area and beach and the time of year. At the dog walking hotspots, you tend



Emma Sturman (left) with some of the beach clean volunteers

to find a lot of bagged dog poo. If the beach is close to a road where there are parked cars you find a lot of drinks bottles and fast-food packaging. In the sand dunes, it's common to find disposable BBQs in the summer and after high winds the sand erosion tends to uncover old litter such as crisp packets.

“I've found a crisp packet in the sand dunes which had a date on it of 1993 which makes it 28 years old! I also collect the plastic smarties lids I find on beach cleans. There are two types, the Rowntree's version and the Nestle version. Rowntree's added the plastic lids in the 1950s and Nestle took over the brand in 1988 and stopped producing plastic lids in 2005. It's a mystery how these keep appearing on the beach as they haven't been dropped recently.”

Emma hopes to work with other beach cleans and said: “Collaborations are a good way to reach out to more people as

each organisation or group has different followers. Litter picking on my own I felt self-conscious but as a group I felt part of a community as I didn't feel like the odd one out.

“I enjoy it for two main reasons, one is the sense of achievement, knowing the difference I've made by removing the litter from the environment and that it can't harm the wildlife; and the act itself is quite therapeutic and relaxing, maybe it's because I'm by the ocean or maybe it's because I'm on my own in my own headspace, like a form of escapism. It's a great activity for improving your mental health and I'd recommend everyone to have a go if you haven't before. You'll be hooked! ♦

More volunteers are very welcome – full details at [facebook.com/NorfolkBeachCleans/](https://www.facebook.com/NorfolkBeachCleans/) Beach cleans are also organised around the Norfolk coast by several other groups – see norfolkcoastaonb.org.uk

Photo: Norfolk Beach Cleans