Plastic Ocean: an historic book by the indispensable Capt. Charles Moore

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Charles Moore has done more than anyone could imagine after his historic discovery of the monster two-million square mile Great North Pacific Garbage Patch in 1997. He was sailing through the doldrums, but his mind was not in the doldrums. Once back in Long Beach, California, he prepared to go back and research exactly what was all that plastic soup he accidentally encountered on his voyage. He shared his research, conferred with experts, founded a nonprofit organization, and co-produced an award winning documentary, Our Synthetic Sea.

Culture Change readers have known about the plastic plague since 2004, after I met Captain Moore and we discussed petroleum and other subjects of mutual interest. We were introduced by Dr. David Cundiff, a mutual friend known to Culture Change readers for his book The Health Economy. David and Charles have in common a passion for community organic-garden activism.

Charles Moore is our generation's Jacques Cousteau for ocean awareness. As a result of Capt. Moore's tireless publicizing of the problems with plastic, bans of single-use plastic petroleum shopping bags have proliferated. But there is much more to do to stop the plastic plague poisoning our bodies, sea life, and trashing the planet.

On that note, after I received the announcement of Capt. Moore's new book, Plastic Ocean, I asked him one question for Culture Change readers:

"We know plastic bags have been targeted in various ways, and progress made in parts of the world to minimize their proliferation into the environment. What is the status of the movement to clamp down similarly on the plague of bottled water/bottled containers (soda pop, etc.)?"

"Students are making changes in the way drinks are delivered at their colleges and universities. At Thompson Rivers University, in BC, Canada, a mug exchange system is being developed. Small washing machine stations are being set up where you drop off your mug and pick up a clean one. And at Willamette U. in Oregon, vending machines with glass bottles are being set up for deposit redemption and being refilled."

So the trend is positive. Bring your reusable (non-plastic) mugs to your next outing! Drink tap water; it's often better than the plastic bottled product.

Here is the new press release announcing Plastic Ocean:

On Sale: October 27, 2011

Price: $26

Contact: Beth Parker Associate Director of Publicity
212-366-2213

email beth.parker "at" us.penguingroup.com

One man’s life-changing discovery of the “Great Pacific Garbage Patch”

PLASTIC OCEAN: How a Sea Captain’s Chance Discovery Launched a Determined Quest to Save the Oceans

By Capt. Charles Moore with Cassandra Phillips

In 2009, a U.N. joint commission estimated that 6.4 million metric tons of plastic waste currently pollutes the oceans. The U.N. also estimates that 5 million pieces of plastic enter the oceans each day from land. Captain Charles Moore thinks these figures, as shocking as they may seem, could be woefully optimistic.

In 1997, Moore, skipper of ORV Alguita, a 50-foot Tasmania-built catamaran, first comes upon some of that plastic on his way back from a trans-Pacific sailing race, when the strongest El Niño on record forces a detour through the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre -- in sailor lingo, the doldrums. There, he and his travel companions find themselves slowly traversing what he describes as a “plastic soup,” a sweeping mid-oceanic tract speckled with scraps of plastic. He is incredulous, yet galvanized.

PLASTIC OCEAN: How a Sea Captain’s Chance Discovery Launched a Determined Quest to Save the Oceans (Avery, October 27, 2011, $26, Hardcover) by Capt. Charles Moore with Cassandra Phillips tells how Moore returns to this area, soon to be redubbed The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, and culls scientific samples with a game but mostly neophyte crew. The results are shocking: plastic caught in his nets outweigh zooplankton, the oceans’ food base, by a factor of six to one. His research prompts a massive global reassessment of plastics’ invasiveness and raises profound questions about the implications of this man-made, floating landfill.

His initial voyage, his subsequent trips back, his research into this startling discovery, his hard-won scientific credibility, and his dogged, game-changing efforts to get the world to pay attention to a looming plastic peril, are chronicled in PLASTIC OCEAN.

Estimated at three million tons of plastic debris in the Northeast Pacific, between Hawaii and the West Coast, The Great North Pacific Garbage Patch is roughly two million square miles.

With recent natural disasters such as the Japanese tsunami and the flooding in Mississippi and the plastic waste that has been swept out to see as a result, it is more important than ever to clean up our plastics on land in order to keep them out of our oceans.

Captain Moore is one of the main drivers of our awareness of plastic pollution; PLASTIC OCEAN reminds readers that the cleanliness of our water is of utmost importance to our survival, the survival of other species both animal and plant on this planet, and inspires a fundamental rethinking of what happens when you throw away that plastic bag or bottle and where it ultimately ends up.

PLASTIC OCEAN: How a Sea Captain’s Chance Discovery Launched

A Determined Quest to Save the Oceans

Captain Charles Moore with Cassandra Phillips | Avery Books

October 27, 2011 |26.00 | Hardcover

Also available as an eBook

One 8-page color photo insert

www.algalita.org

www.plasticoceanthebook.com

About the Authors:

Capt. Charles Moore is a seafaring environmental researcher, a dynamic speaker, an internationally-recognized pollution expert and activist, and founder of the Algalita Marine Research Foundation. He has appeared on Nightline, The News Hour with Jim Lehrer, Good Morning America, The Today Show, Late Night with David Letterman, the Colbert Report, and in broadcast segments of programs seen on National Geographic Channel, the History Channel, and Animal Planet. He has been featured in numerous articles in magazines including Discovery, Best Life, US News and World Report, The New York Times Magazine, Wend, and Earth Island Journal. A Los Angeles Times multi- part article about the "Plastic Plague" in oceans, instigated by and featuring Moore, won a Pulitzer Prize in 2007. Moore’s frequent voyages to the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre generate extensive local, national, and international TV coverage. A film made by the producers of Academy Award-Winning March of the Penguins, entitled Plastic Planet and featuring Moore, was released last year. He lives in Long Beach, CA.

Cassandra Phillips has worked as a newspaper reporter, as story editor for an independent film producer, and as co-owner-operator of orchid nurseries in California and Hawaii. She co-authored The Passion Paradox: Patterns of Love and Power in Intimate Relationships. In 2006, she won grant funding from the USDA Small Business Innovation and Research program to investigate recycled plastics as an orchid growth medium. She has a B.A. in English from Pomona and a master’s in journalism from U.C. Berkeley.

About Gotham Books:

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Resources and further reading:

Charles Moore founded the Algalita Marine Research Foundation. From their website get their documentary Synthetic Sea, in Spanish or English, from their webpage. They can also provide pamphlets, "Plastic is Forever".

Want to reduce plastic bag usage at supermarkets and by dog walkers? Two handy satchels from 4u2reuse.com arm you with your extra, clean reused plastic bags -- so you are prepared and don't have to use new bags.

See past Culture Change articles on the plastics plague.

The Plastic Pollution Coalition is doing much to fight the plastic plague.