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"Encountering Ghost Species"

Muir, Cameron



Flesh-footed shearwater surrounded by pieces of plastic removed from its stomach in the research station on Lord Howe Island, 2018.

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On Lord Howe Island, 600 kilometres off of Australia's east coast, you can snorkel the world's southernmost coral reef, clamber up a basalt mountain to a cloud forest 850 metres above the sea, and clap your hands to induce providence petrels to fall from the sky and land at your feet. David

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> Attenborough once described this place as “so extraordinary it is almost unbelievable.” It’s the last place I’d expect to witness suffering and death.
>
> I’m here following biologist Jenn Lavers and her team as they study shearwater birds that feed their chicks to death with ocean plastic. Each day we wake at dawn to collect the birds that have died on their first flight and then washed up on the beaches. By midmorning, we head to the lab, where the scientists dissect the birds, pulling out piece after piece of plastic, and then we work until close to midnight in the colony, pumping the chicks’ stomachs with water to induce them to vomit pieces of plastic. (From the article)

This article was originally published in *Springs: The Rachel Carson Center Review* . The journal is an online publication featuring peer-reviewed articles, creative nonfiction, and artistic contributions that showcase the work of the Rachel Carson Center and its community across the world.

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