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A clear message: NCC cadets cleaning the beach at Thiruvanmiyur on the occasion of 'International Coastal Clean-up Day'. Photo: N. Sridharan

Students from various colleges, volunteers from the Indian Coast Guard Region (East), the Tree Foundation's Sea Turtle Protection Force in association with South Asia's Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), a United Nations Environment Programme and Loyola College, came together to clean up the Marina Beach on September 15 to mark 'International Coastal Clean-up Day'.

In another part of Chennai — at the quiet Thiruvanmiyur beach — a similar effort to clean the coast of rubbish and plastics was taken up members of the National Cadet Corps (NCC).

Armed with trash bags, the volunteers at both beaches removed waste such as plastic bags, pet bottles, ice cream sticks and cups and other materials strewn on the seashore. The clean up drive on the Marina was flagged off by Chief Wildlife Warden of Tamil Nadu R. Gunasekaran, in the presence of Indian Coast Guard Region (East) Director Inspector-General B.K. Loshali, H. Malleshappa, Director, Department of Environment, Government of Tamil Nadu, Australia's Consul General in Chennai, David Holly, and Deputy Consul General Stuart Campbell.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Gunasekaran stressed the need to keep the beaches clean. "People should not litter garbage on the beach. They should ensure that beaches are kept neat and clean. Awareness has to be created among the public to avoid use of plastic bags and about proper disposal of solid waste," said S. Regha, Assistant Professor, Department of Bio-Technology, and Co-ordinator of the Nature Club of Kumararani Meena Muthiah College (KRMCC) of Arts and Science, Adyar.

"I come to the beach every week. I find it so dirty. I wanted to join this clean-up drive and make a small difference," said S. Ashok, one of the volunteers. "Regular clean-ups should be organised to keep Chennai beaches free of trash. Dustbins should be placed at strategic locations and signboards should be installed to warn the public against throwing garbage on the beach," he added. P.K. Manivannan, a student volunteer said: "Students should be encouraged to take part in beach cleaning campaigns so that they are aware of the ill-effects of marine pollution. Plastics and other waste materials, when thrown into the marine ecosystem, gets absorbed into food webs causing diseases which are harmful to humans as well as the entire food web," he explained.

Tree Foundation Chairperson Supraja Dharini said, "When a plastic bag floats on the ocean, it will look like a jellyfish to sea turtles and mammals. They can choke or starve to death when their stomachs are filled with plastics. This clean-up is conducted every year in order to spread awareness about the damage done by plastics to the marine wildlife and the environment."

Marine Life on Tour

A 'Marine Life on Tour' float was flagged off from the Marina Beach covering Anna Salai, Raj Bhavan and East Coast Road to create awareness among the public about the threats to the marine ecosystem through pollution, sewage and garbage.

Every year on September 15, volunteers around the world take part in the world's biggest coastal clean-up, known as the International Coastal Clean-up Day.

Since 1986, the International Coastal Clean-up (ICC) has included inland lakes, rivers, and streams in the clean-up, and nearly half a million people in more than 100 countries have participated in the clean-up.

The clean-up drive was part of the International Coastal Clean-up Day.

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