

"PLASTIC PELLET POLLUTION IS A REAL PROBLEM FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT. THE GREAT GLOBAL NURDLE HUNT HELPS IN COLLECTING GLOBAL DATA AND EVIDENCE TO SHOW INDUSTRY AND DECISION-MAKERS THAT URGENT ACTION IS NEEDED!"

BREAK FREE FROM PLASTIC



Nurdles from a hunt in west Wales  
Photo credit: Julie Davies



## CASE STUDY

# Living with the world's worst nurdle disaster



Volunteers from The Pearl Protectors, Sri Lanka.  
Photo credit: The Pearl Protectors

"THE LACK OF GLOBAL COMMITMENTS TOWARDS COMBATING NURDLE POLLUTION THROUGH MARITIME, LOGISTICAL, AND MANUFACTURING INSTANCES HAS FURTHER IMPLICATIONS IN COMBATING FUTURE NURDLE SPILLS."

MUDITHA KATUWAWALA,  
THE PEARL PROTECTORS



# More nurdles found than ever before – The Great Global Nurdle Hunt 2022



Volunteers from The Pearl Protectors, Sri Lanka. Photo credit: The Pearl Protectors

## MICROPLASTIC POLLUTANTS

Nurdles (or plastic pellets) are produced by the plastics industry and are melted down to make nearly all plastic products. Billions of nurdles reach the ocean every year – the equivalent of 15 billion plastic bottles. Nurdles leak out of factories, boats, lorries and industrial sites across the world, smothering our beaches with plastic and harming wildlife.

Fidra's [Great Global Nurdle Hunt](#) has found nurdles on more beaches around the world than ever before. The 2022 event has been the biggest nurdle hunting effort to date, with thousands of volunteers taking part in **317 nurdle hunts** around the globe from 20th September to 17th October 2022. **Nurdles were found on 90% of all sites surveyed**, an increase from the previous years (79% and 87% of hunts found nurdles in 2021 and 2020). The 2022 results clearly demonstrate voluntary efforts from industry are not sufficient and stress the urgency for legislation to stop nurdle pollution once and for all.

### Widespread pollution

It's estimated nurdle hunters found over a million nurdles around the world. From Spain to Sri Lanka, groups scoured beaches to collect data. A total of **23 countries took part in the global search for plastic pellets**, an amazing achievement. Nurdles were found in all but one – Indonesia was the only country to not find nurdles. However, nurdles

have been found in previous nurdle hunts carried out in Indonesia earlier in the year. Nurdles were found for the first time in Japan, Oman and South Korea. As well as becoming more prevalent around the world, the results also show that **nurdles are turning up in high amounts, 39% of the 317 sites found 100 or more nurdles.**

### Thank you for making 2022 the biggest nurdle hunt ever!

A total of **63 organisations participated in the hunt.** Thank you to everyone that organised a nurdle hunt and the amazing 1,365 people who took part – our biggest volunteer effort to date! You have spent a tremendous 1,383 hours (the equivalent of 8 weeks straight!) searching, cleaning and raising awareness about this vital issue. **Your efforts are critical in making this microplastic pollution problem more visible**, helping to increase pressure on government and industry to end nurdle loss.

### Nurdles started washing up on the shores of Sri Lanka after the MV X-Press Pearl ship caught fire on 25th of May 2021.

Days later the bodies of turtles, fish and dolphins followed, wiping out tourism, fishing and local livelihoods overnight. Approximately, 50 to 75 billion nurdles spilled into the sea on the western coast of Sri Lanka.

Muditha Katuwawala, the Coordinator and Founder of Sri Lankan based NGO 'The Pearl Protectors' explains what it's like to live with **the world's worst nurdle spill ever recorded.**

*'During the initial stages of the spill, a 100km beach was completely covered in nurdles further expanding to an impact range of 700km across the islands coast. Marine animals who had mistaken these nurdles to be fish eggs had consumed nurdles, fish containing nurdles were reported from many parts of the island.'*

Because the nurdles were not stowed securely and there are no rules on nurdle storage, labelling or clean up, the spill soon expanded resulting in nurdles being reported in The Maldives and South India. Sea birds' feces were noticed to contain nurdles suggesting seabirds also mistake nurdles to be food.

*'Due to the flames on board the ship and the chemicals spilled, toxic nurdles [are] spreading across the shorelines and sea.'*

*'Removing nurdles has been near impossible due to their size and colour change. With time, the nurdles have moved under the sand making them even more difficult to collect.'*

Many of the pristine coastal areas of Sri Lanka are now polluted with plastic due to the nurdle spill.

*'Lagoons, mangroves, coastal ecosystems have been engulfed in nurdles proving difficult to be restored or nurdles to be removed. The longevity of nurdles in the environment*

*has resulted in plastic pellets being stored within vital and sensitive flora and eco systems.'*

Lack of awareness of the impact of nurdles is another major challenge faced, The Pearl Protectors launched the Nurdle Free Lanka volunteer campaign in response to this disaster, which aims to raise awareness amongst the community, develop nurdle collecting tools, use nurdle hunts and volunteers to document and attempt to clean up the pollution.

*'This is Sri Lanka's largest volunteer campaign focusing on cleaning up the nurdles from our beaches. Separately, there has been lobbying towards legislations against single use plastic in Sri Lanka and creating national awareness.'*

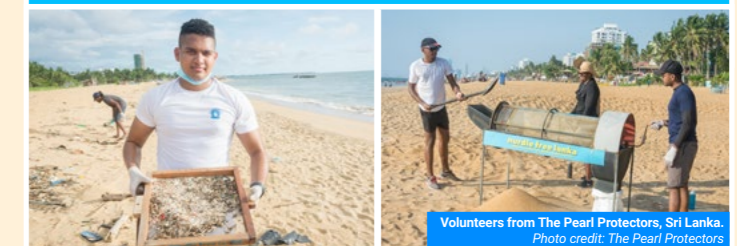
### Great Global Nurdle Hunt finds

The Pearl Protectors hosted four nurdle hunts, with 259 volunteers, collecting an astonishing 35kg of nurdles.

### Measures needed to prevent large spills at sea

The Pearl Protectors alongside many others are calling for governments, industry and the International Maritime Organization to make changes to prevent future nurdle spills at sea.

To find out more about how to stop nurdle pollution visit: <https://hub.nurdlehunt.org/>



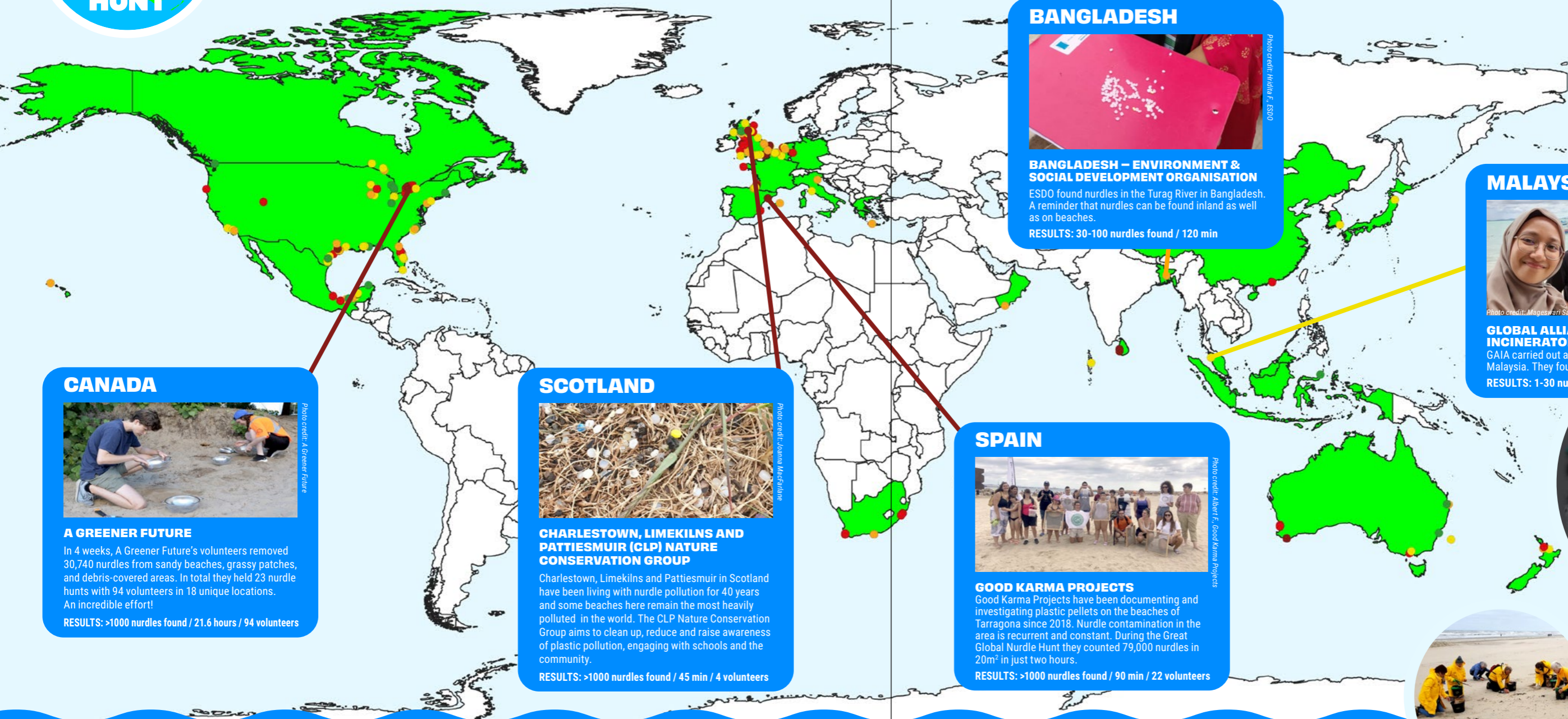
Volunteers from The Pearl Protectors, Sri Lanka.  
Photo credit: The Pearl Protectors



# THE GREAT GLOBAL

# NURDLE HUNT 2022

**90%**  
OF HUNTS  
FOUND  
NURDLES



**CANADA**

**A GREENER FUTURE**  
In 4 weeks, A Greener Future's volunteers removed 30,740 nurdles from sandy beaches, grassy patches, and debris-covered areas. In total they held 23 nurdle hunts with 94 volunteers in 18 unique locations. An incredible effort!  
**RESULTS: >1000 nurdles found / 21.6 hours / 94 volunteers**

**SCOTLAND**

**CHARLESTOWN, LIMEKILNS AND PATTIESMUIR (CLP) NATURE CONSERVATION GROUP**  
Charlestown, Limekilns and Pattiesmuir in Scotland have been living with nurdle pollution for 40 years and some beaches here remain the most heavily polluted in the world. The CLP Nature Conservation Group aims to clean up, reduce and raise awareness of plastic pollution, engaging with schools and the community.  
**RESULTS: >1000 nurdles found / 45 min / 4 volunteers**

**BANGLADESH**

**BANGLADESH – ENVIRONMENT & SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION**  
ESDO found nurdles in the Turag River in Bangladesh. A reminder that nurdles can be found inland as well as on beaches.  
**RESULTS: 30-100 nurdles found / 120 min**

**SPAIN**

**GOOD KARMA PROJECTS**  
Good Karma Projects have been documenting and investigating plastic pellets on the beaches of Tarragona since 2018. Nurdle contamination in the area is recurrent and constant. During the Great Global Nurdle Hunt they counted 79,000 nurdles in 20m<sup>2</sup> in just two hours.  
**RESULTS: >1000 nurdles found / 90 min / 22 volunteers**

**MALAYSIA**

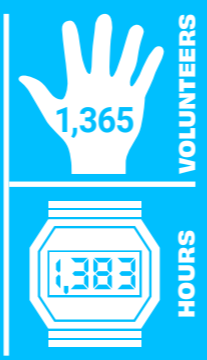
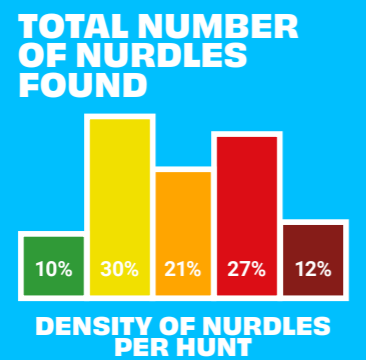
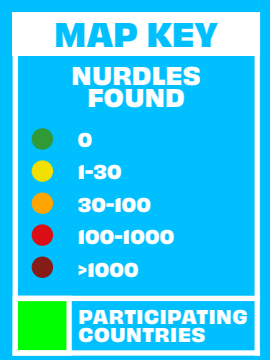
**GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR INCINERATOR ALTERNATIVES**  
GAIA carried out a nurdle hunt on Penang Island in Malaysia. They found 11 nurdles in total.  
**RESULTS: 1-30 nurdles / 30 min / 4 volunteers**

**2,496 nurdles found at Kimmeridge Bay, England**  
Photo credit: Sarah Hodgson

**Nurdle Hunt at Zandvoort, The Netherlands**  
Photo credit: J. Juttersaeluk

**The Pearl Protectors, Sri Lanka**  
Photo credit: The Pearl Protectors

## RESULTS OF A WORLDWIDE PLASTIC POLLUTION SURVEY



**"IT MAKES US FEEL ANGRY. THERE IS NO ACCOUNTABILITY FROM THE POLLUTERS... IT'S ACCEPTED THAT WE JUST HAVE TO PUT UP WITH IT. I THINK COASTAL COMMUNITIES LIKE US SHOULD RECEIVE COMPENSATION FROM HISTORICAL POLLUTERS... CHILDREN GROWING UP WITH PERMANENT PLASTIC POLLUTION ON THE BEACH BEING UNCHALLENGED, WHAT MESSAGE DOES THIS GIVE THEM?"**

**JOANNA MACFARLANE, CHAIR OF CLP NATURE CONSERVATION GROUP**



**"NO AMOUNT OF CLEANUPS WILL EVER BE ABLE TO MAKE UP FOR PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS WHEN HANDLING NURDLES."**

THREE RIVERS WATERKEEPER – USA



Nurdles collected in Cape Town, S. Africa  
Photo credit: Danielle M

# Stopping Nurdle Pollution

There needs to be widespread awareness and collaborative solutions to help end nurdle pollution. Our growing nurdle network allows organisations to share knowledge and expertise on solutions, bringing us all closer to stopping global nurdle pollution. In 2022 organisations have been coming together to prevent further pollution through:

## A global plastics treaty

Earlier this year, world leaders at the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) made the decision to negotiate a global plastics treaty by the end of 2024. If the plastic treaty is ambitious enough it could require countries to limit how much plastic is produced and enforce stringent standards within industries that use plastic, helping to reduce nurdle loss.

## Preventing spills at sea

Many groups around the world including, Litter4Tokens, The Pearl Protectors, Fauna & Flora International (FFI), and Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) are calling for the introduction of new maritime policies and well-equipped maritime contingency plans to combat nurdle spills at sea.

## Legislation & litigation

Organisations in various regions around the world including Australia, USA and Europe are pushing for new and existing laws on the environment, planning and waste to prevent and address nurdle pollution incidents. Some communities and NGOs have successfully mounted legal cases against companies found to be breaking these laws through chronic nurdle pollution.

## Can your organisation support solutions to pollution?

There is a range of ways to tackle nurdle pollution from education to innovation. **If you would like to learn more about nurdle pollution and solutions visit our new [Nurdle Information Hub](#) for NGOs and community groups.**



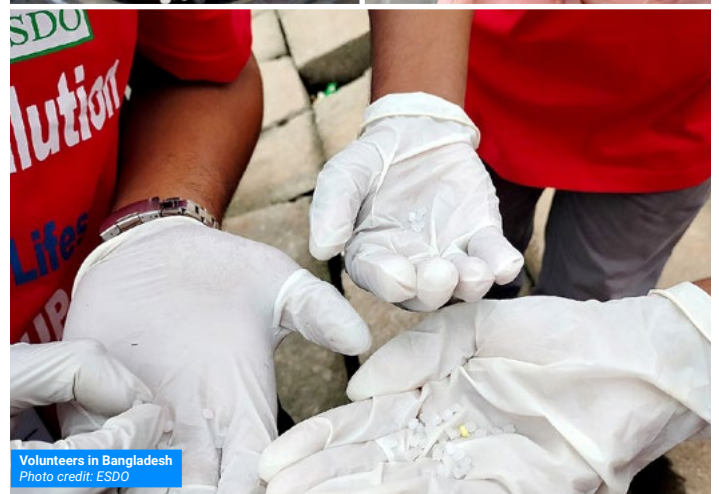
The Pearl Protectors, Sri Lanka  
Photo credit: The Pearl Protectors



Nurdles collected in Perth, Australia  
Photo credit: Erin Osborn



Fish found with ingested nurdles, Sri Lanka  
Photo credit: The Pearl Protectors



Volunteers in Bangladesh  
Photo credit: ESDO