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A Kodak moment indeed

Posted by [Andrew Sharpless](#) at 11:05 PM on 10 May 2007

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To you, this picture may look like ants marching in a desert, but among ocean experts, it has [gone as viral](#) as Britney's shaved head. What you're seeing is an image of shrimp trawlers off the coast of China, taken from space. Those teeny tiny specs are responsible for destroying huge swaths of seafloor, and thanks to these images, which appeared in the prestigious journal *Nature* yesterday, scientists now have irrefutable visual evidence to prove what they could only conceptualize before.

Conservation ecologist Kyle Van Houtan of Duke University in North Carolina stumbled on the groundbreaking images from QuickBird satellite, owned by DigitalGlobe. Van Houtan turned to world-renowned fisheries expert (and [Oceana](#) board member) Daniel Pauly of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver to shed some light on what he was seeing.

The long plumes of sediment churned up by their nets -- dubbed "mudtrails" by Van Houtan and Pauly -- are a highly visible sign of the disturbance to sea-bottom ecosystems that they leave in their wake. The remote-sensing imagery captures details ranging from the number of trawl nets dragged behind a boat to the white dots of seabirds flocking nearby to feast of the unwanted bycatch that is dumped overboard.

The wow factor of being able to see this kind of detail from space is overshadowed by the "terrifying implications" of what these pictures reveal for the future of our oceans.

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