

# Seagull blood shows promise for monitoring pollutants from oil spills

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Seagull blood shows promise for monitoring pollutants from oil spills in marine environments. Courtesy of Alberto Velando, Universidade de Vigo, Spain

Like the proverbial coal miners' canary-in-the-cage, seagulls may become living sentinels to monitor oil pollution levels in marine environments, report scientists in Spain. Their study is scheduled for the Feb. 1 issue of ACS' *Environmental Science & Technology*.

In the study, Alberto Velando and colleagues note that researchers have known for years that large oil spills can increase levels of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in marine environments.

Studies have linked these compounds to cancer in humans. While oil spills quickly kill large numbers of seabirds and other animals, scientists

do not fully understand the non-lethal biological effects of these spills, the Spanish researchers say.

The researchers measured PAH levels in the blood of Yellow-legged gulls living in the vicinity of the oil spill caused by the 2002 shipwreck of the Prestige, one of Europe's largest oil spills. Gulls exposed to the oil showed twice the levels of PAHs in their blood than unexposed birds, even though these levels were measured 17 months after the initial spill, the researchers say. The findings "give support to the nondestructive use of seabirds as biomonitors of oil pollution in marine environments," the article states.

Source: ACS

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