

Unique CSI lab aims to solve crimes against wildlife

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The discovery in a single day of 13 dead bald eagles in Maryland this February caught the nation's attention. The unusual positions of their bodies suggested to investigators that they didn't die of natural causes. So what led to the eagles' deaths? An article in *Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN)*, the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society, profiles the forensic science lab that could help solve the mystery.

Melody M. Bomgardner, a senior editor at *C&EN*, reports that the eagle carcasses were flown to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services forensics laboratory in Ashland, Oregon. Established in 1988, the facility is the only full-service lab in the world dedicated to crimes against wildlife. Its scientists hail from a variety of fields including genetics, chemistry, pathology and other disciplines. At the facility, they use this diverse knowledge base to analyze about 12,000 samples from potential wildlife crimes every year.

About half of the lab's cases involve finished products, such as crocodile skin shoes or rhinoceros horn accessories. Examining entire carcasses is far less common—only about 5 percent of the evidence comes in the form of whole animals.

But the lab has come across dead bald eagles before. In one case, the evidence pointed to illegal poisoning, and resulted in a \$1,000 fine and probation for six months for the person involved. As for the more recent Maryland case, the cause of the 13 eagles' deaths is still under

investigation.

More information: C&EN profiles the Fish & Wildlife forensics lab:
[cen.acs.org/articles/94/i21/CE ... S-Fish-Wildlife.html](https://cen.acs.org/articles/94/i21/CE...S-Fish-Wildlife.html)

Provided by American Chemical Society

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