

Molting feathers may help birds deal with environmental contaminants

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Molting feathers may help birds deal with environmental contaminants. Credit: Margaret Whitney

Mercury is a ubiquitous environmental contaminant that affects the health of birds and other wild animals. Two varieties of songbird—zebra

finch and European starling—were found to shed mercury accumulation with their feathers in a recent study.

During a molt, both species quickly eliminated mercury from their blood and significantly reduced mercury concentrations in other tissues. This, coupled with a migration out of contaminated sites, may help birds deal with exposure to [environmental toxins](#).

"It came as no surprise that feather molt accelerated the mercury elimination, but we did not expect the rates to differ so markedly from the non-songbird species that have been studied previously.

Understanding species differences as well as how molt contributes to mercury elimination can improve [risk assessments](#)," said Margaret Whitney, co-author of the *Environmental Toxicology & Chemistry* study.

More information: *Environmental Toxicology & Chemistry* , [DOI: 10.1002/etc.3888/full](#)

Provided by Wiley

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