

PPE waste kills animals throughout the entire world

March 24 2021



Credit: Leiden University

Face masks and gloves designed to protect us are, in fact, dangerous for the animals around us. Scientists from Leiden warn that throughout the world, on land and in the water, animals are ingesting corona waste, or getting entangled in it. The two biologists are asking for everybody's help to better identify the consequences.

It all started when litter researchers found a perch in the canals of Leiden that had become caught up in a latex glove. As far as we know, this was the first Dutch victim of corona [waste](#). Since then, they have been trying to obtain an overall picture of the consequences of the corona waste

mountain on animals.

Biologists Auke-Florian Hiemstra from Naturalis Biodiversity Center and Liselotte Rambonnet from Leiden University started a quest to determine how often and where interactions between corona waste and animals occur. They collected observations from Brazil to Malaysia and from [social media](#) to local newspapers and international news websites. A fox in the United Kingdom, birds in Canada, hedgehogs, seagulls, crabs, and bats—it transpired that all sorts of animals, everywhere, become entangled in [face masks](#).

They found reports about apes chewing on face [masks](#), and about a penguin with a face mask in its stomach. Pets too, especially dogs, were found to swallow face masks. "Animals become weakened due to becoming entangled or starve due to the plastic in their stomach," Rambonnet emphasizes. The diversity of animals influenced by corona waste is considerable. "Vertebrates and invertebrates on land, in freshwater, and in seawater become entangled or trapped in corona waste," says Hiemstra. In their overview article in the journal *Animal Biology*, they also write that some [animals](#) use the waste as nest material. For example, coots in Dutch canals use face masks and gloves as nest material. "And the packaging from paper handkerchiefs is found in nests too. As such, we even see the symptoms of COVID-19 in animal structures," says Hiemstra.

The scientists from Leiden were able to create their overview thanks to the observations of photographers, litter collectors, birdwatchers, wildlife rescue centers, and veterinarians who shared the observations via social and traditional media. Rambonnet: "As a result of this, we can learn more about the impact of this category of disposable products on wildlife. We therefore ask people to keep sharing their observations so that we can maintain an up-to-date overview." To facilitate this, the duo has set up the website www.COVIDlitter.com. Rambonnet and Hiemstra

hope that this overview will increase people's awareness of the danger of face masks and gloves for wildlife. Furthermore, they call upon everybody to use reusable face masks.

The [scientific paper](#), "The effects of COVID-19 litter on animal life," was published on 24 March in the journal *Animal Biology*.

More information: Auke-Florian Hiemstra et al. The effects of COVID-19 litter on animal life, *Animal Biology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1163/15707563-bja10052](#)

Provided by Leiden University

Citation: PPE waste kills animals throughout the entire world (2021, March 24) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-03-ppe-animals-entire-world.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.