

Plastic leaks in birds

Substances added to plastics easily leach in birds' intestines.

Northern fulmars produce a great deal of stomach oil in the glandular stomach. This oil, which the birds extract from their food, serves as reserve fuel. Substances added to plastics such as plasticizers and flame retardants dissolve easily in the oil. That makes this bird a good model system for demonstrating leakage of these substances from plastic.

Susanne Kühn (Wageningen Marine Research) and her colleagues put this test. They added a mixture of ground plastic to stomach oil taken from fulmars and monitored the leaking process. Five of the 15 sub-

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stances identified in the plastic leaked into the stomach oil to a considerable degree. What is more, the leakage started almost instantly.

It is not clear whether the concentrations reach harmful levels, as the measurement method used does not give absolute concentrations. Even so, Kühn finds the results worrying. 'Some of the substances are carcinogenic or disrupt the hormone balance.' ^{RK}