



# The Problem With Lead

Lead shot and rifle ammunition is widely used in hunting upland game, deer, moose and most other species except waterfowl. Lead sinkers are still used for fishing. Lead poisoning has been documented in over 130 species worldwide, including humans.

Every year at CWRC we receive eagles that are poisoned by lead, usually during or just after hunting season. The main reason birds like eagles will get lead poisoning is due to the behaviour of lead ammunition when it strikes an animal like a deer. Lead ammunition can fragment into hundreds of pieces, and can be found 18 inches or more from the wound channel. This presents risk of lead ingestion to both scavenging species and to humans eating meat harvested with lead.



- Birds will obtain lead in several ways:**
1. Animals that are shot and get away only to die later.
  2. Through shooting “nuisance” wildlife and leaving the bodies behind.
  3. Euthanasia of cattle or other livestock with lead bullets.
  4. Leaving GUT PILES behind after harvesting an animal.  
There can be hundreds of fragments in each gut pile and even one piece can be fatal to an eagle
  5. Eating lead-based fishing sinkers, lures and weights that are left behind.

## Recover



Once an eagle eats meat containing lead, the poisoning process starts. The acid in the stomach breaks the lead down and releases it into the blood, and the small stones in the gizzard will grind the lead down and make it available to the bloodstream. Once the lead is released into the blood it can start to cause toxic effects, and it then settles in tissues like the brain and bones where it stays for life or until the bird dies. Lead poisoning effects the blood system, digestion, muscles, major organs like the liver and kidneys and nervous tissue like the brain. It eventually causes death over a period of days to weeks. Birds with lead poisoning can sometimes be treated if they are captured early enough and the lead levels aren't too high, but most will die as they aren't found or they are found too late.

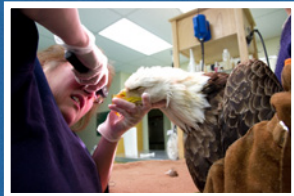
Typically eagles with lead poisoning will be on the ground and unable to fly, they stagger or act like

## Rehabilitate



they are dizzy and they show little or no fear of humans.

Eating lead fragments in harvested meat is also of concern for people. Many of the fragments are too small to be



## Release



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detected in the mouth and when swallowed the acid environment in the human digestive tract can also release lead into the bloodstream. Experts now say there is no safe lead level in children and areas that have studied lead fragmentation in harvested venison are recommending that it should not be fed to children under 6 years of age (as lead can affect the developing brain) or to pregnant women.

Luckily there are alternatives to lead ammunition. Copper, steel and other metals are now available. This ammunition does not fragment. The most common type used for deer and moose hunting is a solid copper bullet with a hollow tip that will expand when it hits the animal, resulting in a fast clean kill. If this ammunition is used the gut pile and other portions of the animal can be left behind without worry that another animal will get poisoned.

Lead poisoning in bald eagles and other scavenging species is a problem with a solution. It is easily prevented by voluntarily switching to non-lead ammunition. If lead ammunition is used, the minimum precaution recommended is to bury or remove the gut pile and leave no parts of the harvested animal for scavengers to eat. Hunters have long been considered conservationists and switching to non-lead ammunition is an opportunity for the hunting community to take a leadership role. Using non-lead ammunition protects people and wildlife and also decreases the amount of lead in the environment.

## Educate

In 2012 the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters passed a resolution aimed at educating hunters to voluntarily switch to non-lead ammunition because of the health risks to wildlife and humans posed by lead.

