



Vermont Legislative Research Shop

The Effect of Lead Sinkers on Waterfowl

Lead has been recognized as a detrimental substance to waterfowl as attributed to lead toxicosis. Lead sinkers and jigs are the main cause of lead toxicosis in loons, especially when lead accumulates in heavy fishing areas.

In North America, the Common Loon is most commonly reported as dying from this cause, although at least 23 other species...are vulnerable. Bans on the use of lead fishing weights have been imposed in Yellowstone National Park, Redrocks Lake National Wildlife Refuge, and the National Elk Refuge in the USA. 22% of 202 Common Loons found dead in New England had ingested lead objects, principally sinkers and jigs. All of the loons that had ingested lead were adults representing 38% of the 115 adults examined. The percentage is even higher if birds collected only from fresh water are considered, i.e. 57% of 74 adult birds. These results show that lead toxicosis is a major mortality factor for Common Loons in Eastern North America, although the data probably represents a portion of the birds dying from this cause. Lead poisoned waterfowl commonly hide in dense cover as they become weaker, and are easily overlooked even by those searching for them (Twiss, 1998).

Through experimenting with captive waterfowl it has been shown that a single dose of .3 grams of lead per bird

