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BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

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ARMS INDUSTRY SPONSORS RESEARCH PROGRAM TO ELIMINATE WATERFOWL LOSSES FROM LEAD POISONING

A cooperative research effort now underway may result in fewer ducks and geese dying accidentally of lead poisoning, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall announced today.

The Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturer's Institute, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, and the Illinois Institute of Technology—Research Institute (I.I.T.-R.I.) are working together to try to solve the vexing problem of waterfowl poisoning caused when ducks eat some of the lead shot fired by hunters each year.

Many waterfowl feed by gleaning seeds and other food from the bottom of lakes, ponds and marshes. Birds feeding in a hunted area may pick up waste lead shot that can lodge in the gizzard, be ground into finer particles and exposed to digestive fluids. This action can create residues that have a toxic effect on the liver, kidneys and possibly the gizzard.

Major American and Canadian producers of sporting firearms are financing, through the industry's trade association, a $100,000 study by I.I.T.-R.I., one of the Nation's ourstanding technical research organizations. Its effort is directed to identify a substitute or modification for lead shot.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife will arrange for a variety of tests on substitute or modified shot at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center near Laurel, Maryland. These will determine short and long-range toxicity, and possible effects upon waterfowl reproduction and the aquatic environment.

When biological-ecological tests are completed by Patuxent technicians, the ammuntion and firearms makers will check ballistics of the substitute of modified shot. If it passes these tests, shot shell samples will be tested by Waterfowl Flyway Councils under field or hunting conditions.

"The problem is difficult," Bureau Director John S. Gottschalk said. "We need a metal or other material with approximately the same sectional density as lead, one that does not create hazards when ingested by birds or other wildlife, and the cost of which is not prohibitive. This is a big order.

"It's a problem that must be solved," the Director emphasized. "We believe that biologists, ballistics experts and metallurgists--working together--will come up with a solution."

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