

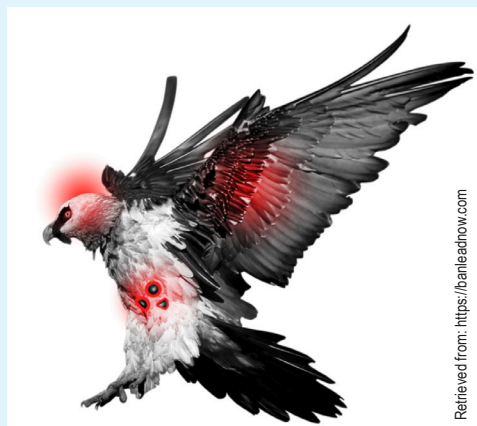
THREATS OF LEAD AMMUNITION AND LEAD FISHING WEIGHTS TO MIGRATORY BIRDS

Hunter with dog © Pixabay.com

THE EFFECTS OF LEAD ON MIGRATORY BIRDS

The ingestion of lead from ammunition, fishing weights and contaminated prey has devastating impacts on many bird species and is one of the leading causes of wild bird mortality (Vallverdú-Coll et al., 2019; Green et al., 2022).

Waterfowl, raptors and scavenger birds are particularly at risk of lead poisoning due to their feeding habits (Pain et al., 2019). Acute exposure to high levels through the ingestion of lead causes rapid fatality in many bird species (Pain et al., 2019). Meanwhile, chronic exposure to lead can impair neurological functions, weaken the immune system and affect the reproductive system of avian species (Vallverdú-Coll et al., 2019; Chiverton et al., 2022).



Retrieved from: <https://banleadnow.com>

What is lead and how does it enter the environment?

Lead (Pb) is a heavy metal that is being used in various products, contributing to its widespread release into the environment (Green et al., 2022). The toxicity of lead to both wildlife and humans has been well-documented for decades, leading to increased global regulations to limit its release (Chiverton et al., 2022; Ganz et al., 2018). However, in certain applications, the use of lead remains unregulated, continuing to pose risks to the environment.

Lead is still commonly found in ammunition, including gunshot pellets and bullets which are used for hunting and sports shooting (Pain et al., 2019) and in fishing weights, which help to keep nets and tackle submerged (Grade et al., 2019).

Birds are particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning through the ingestion of spent ammunition left in the environment by hunters and sportsmen (Pain et al., 2019). Many bird species also ingest lead fishing weights as they mistake it for food or grit (Grade et al., 2019). Additionally, scavenger birds and raptors are exposed when they feed on prey or carrion contaminated with lead bullets (Green et al., 2022; Pain et al., 2019).

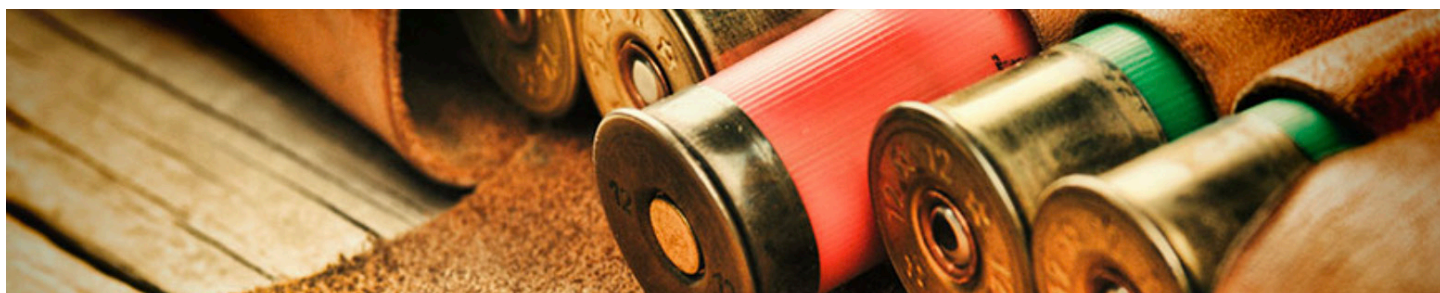
Proposed Restrictions of Lead within the EU

In January 2021, the European Commission amended the Commission Regulation on the manufacture, placing on the market and use of certain dangerous substances, mixtures and articles (Annex XVII to Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006) to restrict the use of lead in wetlands, aiming to reduce lead poisoning among waterbirds (European Commission, 2021).

However, despite this measure, approximately 97,000 tonnes of lead are still released into the environment, primarily from sports shooting (79%), hunting (14%), and fishing (7%). If no further action is taken, an estimated 1.94 million tonnes of lead could accumulate over the next 20 years (ECHA, 2021).

In response to these serious concerns, the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) has proposed stricter EU-wide restrictions on lead use in ammunition for hunting, outdoor sports shooting as well as in fishing to the European Commission (ECHA, 2021). In February 2025, the European Commission presented a draft proposal for broader lead regulations based on ECHA's recommendations.

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Retrieved from: <https://www.face.eu/2022/12/faces-guidanceon-lead-ammunition>

THE CMS LEAD TASK FORCE

The CMS Preventing Poisoning Working Group developed the Guidelines to Prevent the Risk of Poisoning to Migratory Birds, adopted at COP11 in 2014. These guidelines address five key poisoning areas, including lead ammunition and fishing weights, through both legislative and non-legislative measures.

The Lead Task Force: A Call for Action

Established by COP13 (Resolution 11.15 (Rev.COP13)) and formalized at the 52nd Standing Committee Meeting in 2021, the Lead Task Force is set to support the global phase-out of lead ammunition and fishing weights. To move forward, it requires engagement from stakeholders.

The Lead Task Force will:

- Support ongoing efforts for a stricter ban of lead in the EU
- Support the implementation of poisoning prevention guidelines
- Raise awareness among hunters and anglers about lead poisoning risks
- Promote the adoption of non-toxic alternatives



The CMS Secretariat is currently exploring options to implement CMS Decisions 14.134 and 14.136, which would include hiring a coordinator for this Task Force and develop guidance on the steps and procedures needed to develop legislation for a complete phase-out of the use of lead ammunition and lead fishing weights in all habitats.

About CMS

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans. It has 133 Parties (as of 1 March 2025).

CMS engages all relevant stakeholders in addressing threats to migratory species in concert with all other aspects of wildlife conservation and management.

CMS Instruments

Animals receive protection under CMS through listing in its two Appendices, through global or regional agreements and through action plans. With regard to lead poisoning, the AEWa and Raptors MOU should be emphasised in particular, which target the most affected groups of migratory birds. For more information about how the CMS works please check www.cms.int.

Contact

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