



Wildlife Veterinary Care

Belinda Burwell, D.V.M.

Lead poisoning in Eagles

Every winter, large numbers of eagles and various other raptor species become sick or die from lead poisoning. These deaths, however, are 100% preventable.



During hunting season, raptors often have the opportunity to feed on the carcasses of deer and other animals that were shot and either left behind by hunters, or got away and died later. Unfortunately, these carcasses may contain very small fragments of lead bullets or lead pellets buried in the meat and entrails, and these fragments are easily ingested by the feeding raptors. (See the radiographs below).

It does not take much lead to make these animals extremely ill. I recently treated a bald eagle with severe lead poisoning caused by consuming just two small lead pellets. When this eagle was found, he was struggling to stand and having seizures. Testing showed his blood lead level was 3,670 ug/dl. That is more than 180 times the minimum toxic level of 20 ug/dl. (Levels above 5 ug/dl are considered toxic in children.) While we were able to lower his blood lead level using chelation treatment, we were unable to reverse the damage already done, and he later died of multiple organ failure caused by lead toxicity.

Videos and photos of this eagle can be viewed here:

<https://www.facebook.com/wildlifeveterinarycare/>

Through public education, we hope to prevent more wildlife from being poisoned by lead ingestion, and we are asking for your help. The deaths of these beautiful birds could be prevented simply by asking hunters to switch to non-lead ammunition. Ammunition manufacturers are aware of this problem and have developed alternative products that do not contain lead and will not cause this toxicity if accidentally ingested.

Spread the word to help save these beautiful raptors - ask hunters to switch to non-lead ammunition.



This is one of the lead pellets (photographed next to a quarter for scale) that poisoned the eagle above.

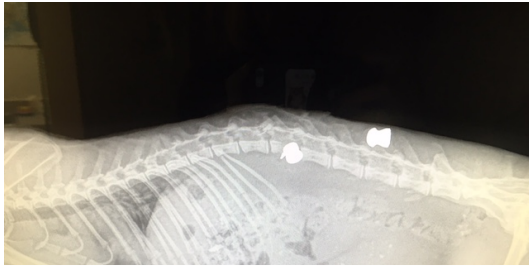


This is a radiograph of the lead poisoned eagle above showing the two small lead pellets in its GI tract.



An eagle scavenging on a deer carcass.

Fragments of lead in the meat of a deer shot with a lead bullet.



A squirrel that survived being shot and has lead bullets in healed wounds on his back. Any raptor that caught and ate this squirrel would have developed lead poisoning.



Wildlife Veterinary Care is a 501c3 charity that gives free veterinary care to sick and injured wildlife, and monitors the health of wildlife and the environment.

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Our mailing address is:

PO Box 288 Millwood, VA 22646

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