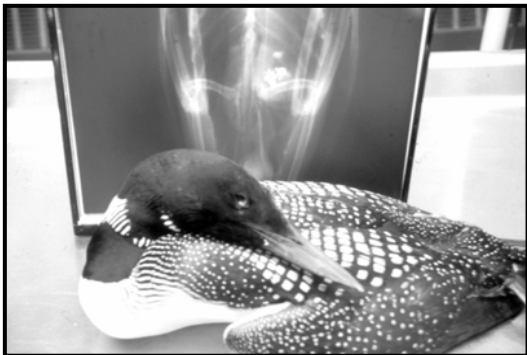


## WHY IS LEAD A PROBLEM?

Lead is toxic to animals and humans when ingested. Loons, swans, herons and other waterbirds can die from lead poisoning after swallowing lead fishing tackle inadvertently lost by anglers. Research in the northeastern United States and Canada, where loons breed, has found that lead poisoning from ingestion of lead sinkers and jigs accounts for 10-80% of dead adult loons found by researchers. This research indicates that, in most areas, more loons die from lead poisoning than from tumors, trauma, fractures, gunshot wounds, infections, or conflict between loons.

Sport anglers attach lead weights to fishing lines to sink the hook, bait, or lure into the water. Some anglers use lead-weighted hooks, called jigs. A sinker or jig may accidentally detach from a line and fall into the water, or the hook or line may become tangled and the line may break or be cut.

Many lead sinkers and jigs are similar in appearance to the small stones and grit that birds swallow to help digest food in their gizzards. Loons and other waterbirds may also eat fish that still have a hook and sinker attached that was broken from an angler's line.



## WHY CARE ABOUT LOONS?

Loons are ancient birds that are a symbol of wild, remote areas. Loon calls and behaviors enrich the outdoor experience for many people, including anglers.

The loon species that breeds in New York is the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*). Besides lead poisoning, New York loons face many other threats, including human interference during nesting and chick rearing, fewer sites available for nesting, predation by raccoons and other animals, sensitivity to changes in water levels, and the potentially harmful effects of mercury.

Loons are not the only species of birds affected by lead sinkers and jigs. However, loons have been studied extensively in New York and throughout the Northeast, and their deaths due to ingestion of lead fishing tackle are well documented.

## LEAD POISONING

Lead poisoning causes physical and behavioral changes in birds, including loss of balance, tremors, and impaired ability to fly. The weakened bird is more vulnerable to predators, and may have trouble feeding, nesting, and caring for young. It becomes emaciated and dies within 2-3 weeks after eating lead fishing tackle.



## SAFER FISHING TACKLE

***Lead poisoning does not have to happen!***

Sinkers and jigs do not have to be made of lead. Inexpensive and ecologically sound alternatives to lead fishing weights are available. Anglers can use sinkers and jigs made from non-poisonous materials including:

- ❖ Bismuth
- ❖ Recycled glass
- ❖ Steel
- ❖ Tin
- ❖ Tungsten

(Brass is not recommended because it contains zinc, which is also toxic to wildlife.)

Switching to alternative materials will reduce the chance that loons and other waterbirds will swallow poisonous lead products that have accidentally fallen into the water or that were lost while fishing.

## HOW CAN ANGLERS HELP?

- ❖ Use non-lead fishing weights. You could save the life of a loon, swan, or other waterbird.
- ❖ Ask your local sporting goods store to stock non-lead fishing tackle.
- ❖ Dispose of old lead sinkers and jigs properly.
- ❖ **Spread the word!** Tell other anglers about the problem with lead, and encourage them to switch to non-lead sinkers and jigs.

Anglers have been strong supporters of wildlife conservation for decades. Aiding loons, ducks, and other waterbirds provides yet another opportunity to continue this conservation legacy.

## NEW REGULATIONS

To help protect waterbirds from getting lead poisoning, Great Britain banned the use of lead sinkers in 1987. In Canada, it is illegal to use lead fishing sinkers and jigs in national parks and national wildlife areas. Lead sinker use is banned in three national wildlife refuges and one national park in the United States. New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont have also passed legislation regulating the use or sale of lead tackle within those states. In New York, legislation banning the sale of small lead sinkers (½ ounce or less) took effect in May, 2004.

*Please remove these lead sinkers from your tackle box:*

- ❖ Split shot



- ❖ Egg sinker



- ❖ Lead-headed jig

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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The ACLP is a partnership of the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Natural History Museum of the Adirondacks, the NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation, BioDiversity Research Institute, and the Audubon Society of New York, Inc.



This brochure was developed by the Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program. Some information in this brochure was reprinted with permission from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. Photos have been provided by NYS DEC Wildlife Pathology Laboratory, USFWS, and ACLP.

# GET THE LEAD OUT!



**Lead harms loons and other waterbirds.**

*Please help them!*

