

# Press release: Lead ammunition finally banned from wetlands across the EU

Europe and Central Asia Sites Species Systems



1 million waterbirds will be saved annually

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As of today, the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2023, using lead shot ammunition in wetlands is illegal in all 27 EU countries, as well as Iceland, Norway, and Lichtenstein. The law comes into force following a 2-year period given to the EU countries to prepare for the change.<sup>[1]</sup>

Image credits: Yves Adams

With this law in place, the lives of an estimated 1 million waterbirds which currently die of lead poisoning in the EU, will be saved and the perpetuation of extreme poisoning of wetland wildlife will be tackled once and for all. Exposure to lead can also have severe consequences for people should they be exposed to it, especially children.

Lead shot cartridges consists of hundreds of tiny round lead projectiles that hunters spray out of their shotguns to kill animals. They use it to hunt waterbirds and other small animals, in wetlands and elsewhere.

It is estimated that hunters have been polluting our wetlands with more than 4,000 tonnes of lead shot annually, despite the existence of competitively priced alternatives.

Lead shot is particularly problematic for waterbirds that ingest lead pellets, mistaking them for grit: small particles of stone or sand. Birds swallow small bits of grit to act like teeth in their gizzard, a specialized stomach constructed of thick, muscular walls used for grinding up food. The grit helps break down hard foods, such as seeds.

The ban will also decrease the secondary poisoning of raptors and scavengers, which are regularly poisoned while eating prey contaminated with lead shot.

The BirdLife Partnership has been working to have this poisonous ammunition banned for more than 20 years.

**Barbara Herrero, Senior EU Nature Policy Officer, BirdLife Europe:**

“This is huge. Despite banning lead from paint, petrol and virtually everything else several decades ago, it was still allowed to poison our shared environment – even when alternatives exist. With this ban, the EU has addressed a significant part of the problem. We now call on EU countries to make sure the ban is enforced.”

Unfortunately, the ban does not go beyond wetlands. Lead ammunition in hunting and outdoor sports shooting away from wetlands, as well as lead used in fishing sinkers and lures, will continue to poison the environment. But that can change soon. The European Chemicals Agency has been working hard on a second restriction which proposes a complete ban on their use. The BirdLife Partnership will continue to stand up to the ammunition industry and hunting lobby to ensure Europe has the non-toxic environment it deserves.

ENDS.

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Notes for editors:

[1] All countries where the **REACH Regulation** applies will need to enforce a prohibition on the carrying and use of lead shot in, or within 100m of, wetlands, as defined by the Ramsar convention.

Ramsar defines wetlands as: “areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres.” (Article 1.1 of the Convention)

*BirdLife Europe and Central Asia is a partnership of 43 national conservation organisations and a leader in bird conservation. Our unique local to global approach enables us to deliver high impact and long-term conservation for the benefit of nature and people. BirdLife Europe and Central Asia is one of the six regional secretariats that compose BirdLife International. Based in Brussels, it supports the European and Central Asian Partnership and is present in 43 countries including all EU Member States. With more than 4100 staff in Europe, two million members and tens of thousands of skilled volunteers, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, together with its national partners, owns or manages more than 6000 nature sites totalling 320,000 hectares.*

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