



## NORTHWEST TERRITORIES CONTAMINANTS FACT SHEETS

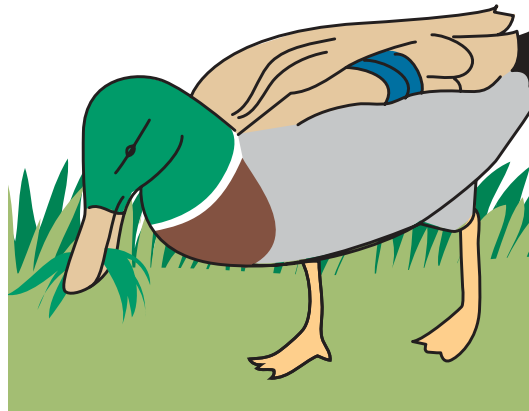
# Waterfowl

Waterfowl such as ducks and geese are included in the traditional diets of northerners. They are an important part of their health, culture and economy. People in the Northwest Territories are becoming more aware of contaminants in the environment. This fact sheet will describe what types of contaminants can be found in waterfowl, how they get there, and what this means to the health of people who eat them.

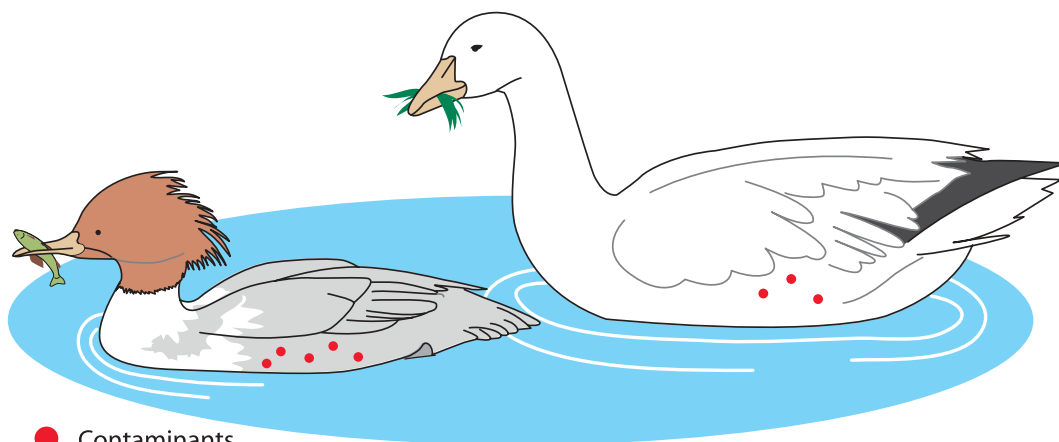
**Levels of contaminants in waterfowl are generally very low.**

Most waterfowl are very low in all contaminants. However waterfowl that eat fish, like mergansers, are higher on the food chain than those that eat mostly plants or insects, like geese. Contaminants become more concentrated when animals (predators) eat other animals (prey). This process is called biomagnification.

Contaminant levels in an animal can slowly build up over time, if the animal continues to eat foods with contaminants. This is called bioaccumulation.



Contaminants are grouped into major types, which build up in the fat or in the organs of animals. Contaminants such as persistent organic pollutants (see POPs fact sheet) build up in fat, mostly in marine animals, and are not a concern with waterfowl. Contaminants such as heavy metals (see heavy metals fact sheet) can build up in organs of certain land animals and birds. This is because the organs act as filters for the body.



● Contaminants



Contaminant levels have been measured in waterfowl because they are an important traditional food. Studies have found that most contaminants are present at such low levels that they are not considered health risks to waterfowl or to the people who eat them. The only contaminants found in slightly higher levels were certain heavy metals which can concentrate in the organs of some ducks.

### Ducks and geese are safe to eat!

There have never been any health advisories issued in the Northwest Territories due to contaminants in birds. Contaminant levels in ducks and geese are so low that they pose no health risks, as long as they are cleaned very carefully if killed using lead shot.

There are health risks if a piece of lead shot remaining in the bird is accidentally swallowed when eating waterfowl. Lead is a heavy metal, and too much of it can affect the nervous system, kidneys and brain. To reduce exposure to lead in waterfowl the following steps can be taken:

- Clean ducks and geese very carefully.
- Clean them soon after they are shot.
- Better yet, switch from lead shot to shot made from steel, bismuth or iron.



- Contaminants

## Good News...



### Waterfowl is a very healthy food!

All living things, including waterfowl, contain some contaminants, but they are still very healthy and nutritious.

- Waterfowl such as ducks and geese are excellent sources of iron, protein and B vitamins.
- Duck eggs are a great source of iron and vitamin A.
- Goose intestine and liver are high sources of zinc.

Waterfowl is a delicious and affordable food that is good for you in many ways. Eating them helps keep people connected with the land and their cultures. Hunting for waterfowl helps keep you fit and healthy too.

## Did you know...

Contaminant levels can be affected by the migratory habits of waterfowl. Birds that fly south to polluted areas may be exposed to more contaminants than birds that do not.

### For more information please contact:

Contaminants Division  
Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development  
(867) 669-2699  
Box 1500,  
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2R3

QS-Y223-015-EE-A1