INTRODUCTION

I hosted this symposium with its diverse audience, all with an interest in lead ammunition, with a certain feeling of déjà-vu. It is now some 30 years since I was heavily involved in the issues of lead poisoning; on that occasion the victims were primarily mute swans *Cygnus olor* and the source of the lead was fishing weights. Eventually – and it took several years of research and debate – the sale and use of the most commonly used sizes of fishing leads were forbidden. The result was dramatic, nationally the mute swan population doubled in the next ten years; on the lowland, most heavily-fished rivers such as the Thames, the increases were even greater.

Then, as now, the stakeholders involved appeared to have some sort of blind-spot when it came to seeing lead as a poison. "Surely this little pellet isn't dangerous?", "It doesn't really dissolve does it?" I do not believe that in the 1980s we would ever have made any real progress on the issue of lead poisoning from fishing weights in mute swans had it not been for the newspapers of the time being filled with news of lead in petrol. Nowadays, no one can be oblivious to the issues of lead because of the damage to human health, particularly children's health due to impacts on their developing brains. Eating food with lead purposefully shot into it, of course, now seems like a bad idea.

The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution report on Lead in the Environment (RCEP, 1983), made clear the potential dangers of lead, recommending that its use for ammunition and for fishing weights should be withdrawn. Successive Governments have dragged their heels over the issue of lead ammunition, none seeing it as a serious enough concern compared with other issues with which they are dealing. This is strange in view of the growing awareness by the Medical Profession who have steadily lowered the permitted levels of lead, especially in food and drink. For wildlife there are some regulations on the use of lead gunshot but these are clearly not working. It seems to me that more than 30 years is more than enough time to decide to take action to stop it from being distributed into the environment. This has gone on for over a century or two contaminating soils, poisoning wildlife and resulting in a gradual build-up that can only make the situation worse; it is certainly easier to spread it around than to collect it!

I hope the opportunity given by this Oxford Lead Symposium and its proceedings, to learn about the progress made with so many aspects of the problems that the use of lead poses, as well as solutions to the problem, will help make the UK a healthier and safer place.

Professor Chris Perrins, LVO, FRS.

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REFERENCES

RCEP (1983). Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. Ninth report. Lead in the environment. (T.R.E. Southwood). CMND 8852 Monograph. HMSO. London.

Lead poisoned whooper swan *Cynus cygnus* close to death found in Scotland, 10 years after introduction of regulations to reduce lead in wetlands. Eroded lead gunshot was subsequently found in the bird's gizzard.

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