

## GREAT LAKES WATERFOWL THREATENED BY CHEMICAL CONTAMINATION

Port Rowan, Ontario, 10 September, 2002: Researchers with the Long Point Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Fund have released preliminary results from a study of Lesser and Greater Scaup on the lower Great Lakes which demonstrates that selenium (Se) levels in most birds have reached and exceeded the level at which reproductive impairment can be expected. Some birds even had Se levels high enough to impact their own survival.

"It is critical that we share this information because if selenium is causing a problem for scaup, it may well be impacting other species," said Dr. Scott Petrie, Research Director for LPWWRF. "There has been a nine-fold increase in the number of diving ducks wintering on the Canadian side of Lake Ontario since 1991 and this increase can be attributed primarily to those species that eat zebra mussels."

Scaup have switched to a diet dominated by readily available zebra mussels, an exotic European species, inadvertently introduced to the Great Lakes in 1986. Zebra mussels are filter feeders, and as such, absorb toxins that can subsequently be passed up the food chain to waterfowl. LPWWRF initiated the study as a result of the long-term decline of continental scaup populations and will continue to analyze samples during 2002 and 2003. It may well be that declining populations are linked to reproductive impairment or reduced survival caused by a diet of contaminated mussels.

"Dr. Petrie's research is a critical element in studies being conducted on Lesser and Greater Scaup across Canada and the United States," said Michael Bradstreet, Executive Director of Bird Studies Canada, which administers the research fund. "These data could have a significant impact on future Canadian and American environmental regulations."

The Long Point Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Fund is a non-profit, non-government organization dedicated to the study and conservation of waterfowl and wetlands at Long Point and throughout the lower Great Lakes. Funding for Dr. Petrie's research has been provided through the generous contributions of conservation-minded hunters. Bird Studies Canada is the preeminent, non-profit, organization committed to advance the understanding, appreciation and conservation of wild birds and their habitats.

- 30 -

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