

Pesticides in birds may close season

By Leslie Kendrick

Although there is a possibility that the waterfowl season could close because of pesticides found in Montana waterfowl, a Nebraska Game and Parks Commission specialist said he is doubtful such measures will be taken.

Joe Hyland, a waterfowl specialist with the commission, said it will know whether the season will be closed by early next week.

Hyland said his office was alerted to the problem when traces of Endrin, a pesticide, began turning up in Montana waterfowl. Hyland said that about 12,000 Montana acres, primarily winter wheat, were treated with the pesticide this spring. After the application of the pesticide, Montana officials discovered many dead fish and found traces of Endrin in fish eggs. Tests were made in the area and Endrin was found in other wildlife, he said.

The highest levels of Endrin were found in waterfowl, Hyland said. Because of the migratory nature of waterfowl other states were altered, he said. Hyland said the waterfowl affected are primarily ducks and geese of several different species.

Montana was not the only state that had Endrin applications, Hyland said. About 100,000 acres in Wyoming, 30,000 acres in South Dakota and 1,000 acres in Nebraska were treated with the pesticide, he said.

Hyland said the commission's chemist is in the process of setting up lab tests. The most important result he said, would be to find the levels of Endrin dangerous for human consumption.

Hyland noted that the commission's testing sample was small. If the commission's testing does not find any Endrin in the Nebraska waterfowl, the commission still cannot guarantee that waterfowl in Nebraska will be free of pesticide traces.

Bill Landis, information specialist with the U.S. Government's Public Involvement Branch, said an Environmental Protection Agency press release reported the Endrin problem may have been exaggerated.

The press released reported that the EPA's staff toxicologist, Henry Spencer, found that Endrin levels in the waterfowl should have no effect on a human eating the fowl. Spencer's findings show that a 60-pound child eating a whole bird containing the highest-known level of Endrin would not be harmed.

Lou Johnson, regional chief of the EPA's toxicology program in Denver, said that despite the EPA's finding, his office is still recommending that people don't eat waterfowl frequently.

Johnson said his office is recommending that persons consuming waterfowl should skin the birds and dispose of all organs to reduce the Endrin levels of the fowl. Endrin settles in the fat of the waterfowl, Johnson said, and by skinning the birds the consumer eliminates much of the fat which could contain Endrin.



Photo by Jerry McBride

Although they look innocent enough, the male and female mallards shown here may be carriers of the pesticide Endrin.

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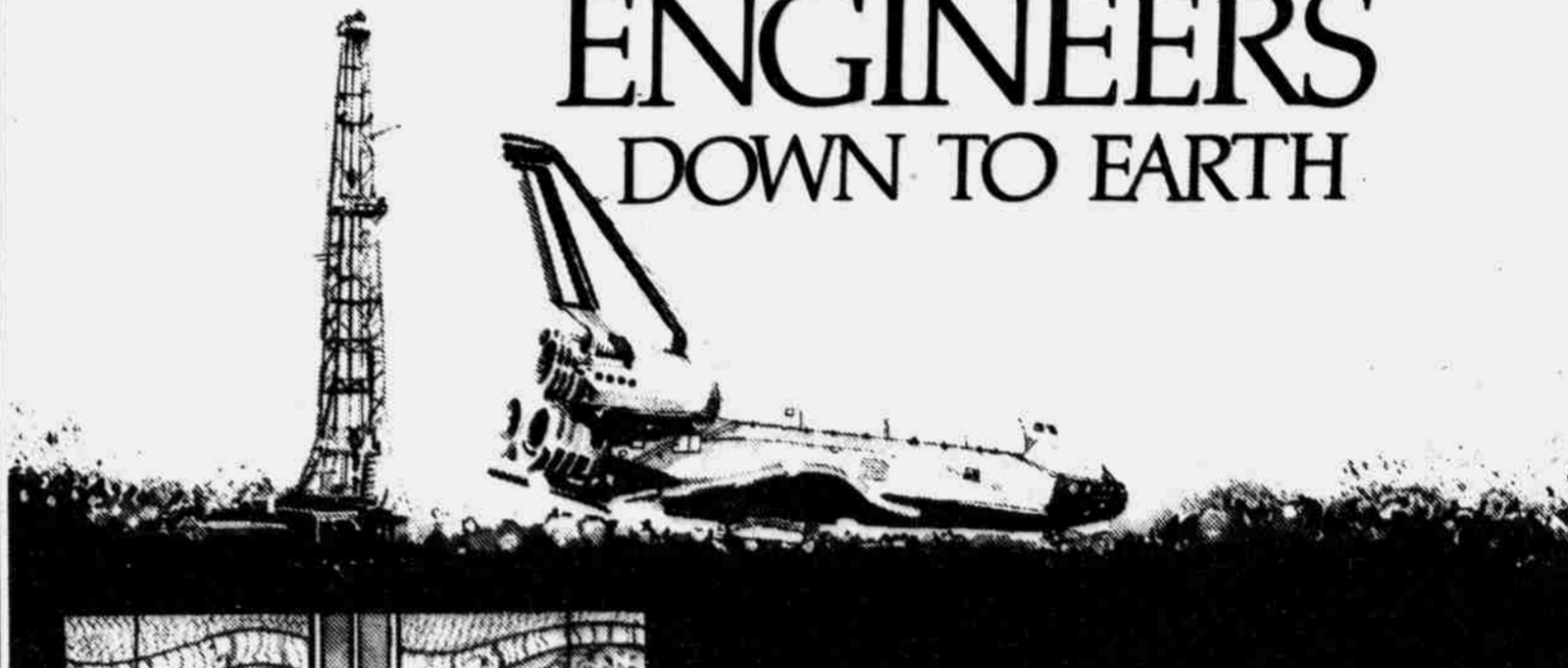
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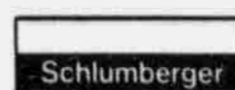
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