

The Last Word

By Judd Cooney



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Non-Lead Bullets: Blessing In Disguise?

LITTLE DID I REALIZE THAT YEARS AGO WHEN MY DAD OR MY FOOTBALL COACH TOLD ME TO "GET THE LEAD OUT," that they were using a phrase that would later be adopted by such nefarious anti-hunting groups.

Trying to eliminate or curtail lead hunting loads along with lead fishing tackle has been in the mill for a lot of years. It's been promoted by various organizations in the guise of conservation, but in reality it's an outright attack on hunting and fishing.

The big push to outlaw lead bullets for rifles came about because some of these same folks found traces of lead in the rare and endangered California condor and immediately blamed spent lead bullets for the condor's decline. The antis, along with the California politicians and others, quickly got on the bandwagon and convinced the governor and politicians to draft a bill to completely eliminate lead bullets in key Condor areas, which passed and became effective in 2007. Not satisfied, they pushed to totally ban lead bullet use in California by 2019.

When the law was being discussed before a legislative vote the U.S Fish & Wildlife Services (USFWS) had in its hands a 2011-12 report that showed there was no significant change in the blood lead levels in condors in spite of the previous 5 years lead ammo ban in the "condor zone." They withheld this information from the legislative hearing until the bill to ban lead bullets across the state was approved and on its way to Governor Jerry Brown's desk where he promptly signed the nation's first statewide ban on lead ammunition.

A later study showed a number of condors with lead in their blood that did not match the isotopic sig-

nature of lead ammunition suggesting there was other sources of lead available to the big birds. Duh!

On the last day the Obama administration, Director Dan Ashe, under the auspices of the president, banned the use of lead ammo and fishing tackle on all USFWS refuges that allowed hunting and fishing. Talk about a blatant attempt by an anti-hunting administration to adversely impact hunting and fishing. Fortunately, the new Secretary of Interior, Ryan Zinke, signed an order overturning this asinine ban on his first day in office. He stated emphatically that proper procedures weren't followed and there wasn't sufficient scientific evidence to support such a ban.

There are definitely downsides to banning lead bullets, the foremost being higher cost. There's even a California study that showed they were more prone to starting fires, a fact which certainly upset the anti crowd. All this lead-bullet hoopla led manufacturers to research, test

non-lead bullets will print right with jacketed lead bullets of the same weight and group just as tightly.

Dynamic Research Technologies (DRT) produces one of the most distinctive and incredibly accurate lead-free bullets that I have tested. Designed originally for self defense and law enforcement these frangible bullets have a powdered metal core of either copper or tungsten, compressed under thousands of pounds pressure inside a copper jacket. I use both the 39-grain and 69-grain .22-caliber DRTs and when they hit a critter it goes down and stays down. The DRTs leave a caliber-sized entrance hole and no exit, a very fur-friendly bullet.

Barnes and Nosler also have a wide selection of lead-free predator bullets and their accuracy and clean kill ability is also on par with any of their lead-cored bullets or those of any other manufacturer, for that matter.

Cutting Edge Bullets (www.cuttingedgebullets.com) is another

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and actually produce non-lead bullets. Surprisingly, some of these bullets work wonderfully on predators.

Barnes was one of the first proponents of solid-copper bullets years ago, produced mainly for large game that needed the extra penetration and toughness provided by the all-copper bullets and, were at the forefront when it came to producing quality non-lead bullets.

I have shot most of the non-lead bullets on the market today in several ultra accurate predator rifles and can attest to the fact that when I miss a predator with an all copper or brass bullet it rarely is the fault of the bullet. In most cases the

very unique and deadly non-lead variety bullet that I have tested on paper as well as on predators. Made out of either brass or copper, depending on design and features, these bullets are individually machined to incredibly tight tolerances and are incredibly accurate and devastating on predators as well as all big game depending on caliber.

Hopefully the "get the lead out" B.S. is history — except for parents and coaches. But regardless, as a predator hunter, you owe it to yourself to give some of the non-lead bullets available a go, the results might surprise you and you might think about making a switch. 🐾