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Unprecedented Study Finds Over 100 Contaminants in Maine Birds

GORHAM, Maine, March 11, 2007—BioDiversity Research Institute today released a new report documenting that over 100 harmful contaminants were found in Maine bird eggs. Wing Goodale will present the report to the Maine Legislature's Committee on Natural Resources today at 1 p.m.

Flame retardants (PBDEs), industrial stain and water repellants (PFCs), transformer coolants (PCBs), pesticides (OCs), and mercury were found in all 23 species of birds tested. The bird species studied live in a variety of habitats: on Maine's ocean, salt marshes, rivers, lakes and uplands.

"This is the most extensive study of its kind to date and the first time industrial stain and water repellants were discovered in Maine birds," says report author senior research biologist Wing Goodale.

Common loon, Atlantic puffin, piping plover, belted kingfisher, great black-backed gull, peregrine falcon and bald eagle had the highest contaminant levels. The flame retardant deca-BDE, banned last year in Maine, was found in eight species. Overall, eagles carried the greatest contaminant load, and for many contaminants had levels multiple times higher than other species. Many of the contaminants levels recorded were above those documented to have adverse effects.

"These results are significant because many of these contaminants can interact to create effects more harmful than one toxic pollutant alone," said Goodale, "and the pervasiveness of the pollutants strongly suggests that birds and wildlife in other states are also accumulating these contaminants."

"Since we found that birds with high levels of one contaminant tended to have high levels of other contaminants, these compounds may cause top predators, such as bald eagles and peregrine falcons, to have greater difficulty hunting and caring for young," Goodale added.

The report also shows the contaminants are coming from both global and local sources. All the types of contaminants were found in all species—including birds that feed hundreds of miles offshore. This indicates that the pollutants are most likely in rain and snow. Birds in mid-coast and southern Maine tended to have higher levels, suggesting the compounds may also come from local sources such as incinerators and water treatment facilities.

"There is good news," Goodale said. "We found that banned chemicals like PCBs and DDT were significantly lower in Maine today than in the past, showing that by banning chemicals we can decrease levels of harmful contaminants in the environment."

Samples were collected from the following towns: Biddeford, Boothbay, Bridgton, Bucksport, Chester, Criehaven TWP, Dead River TWP, Deer Isle, Eastport, Falmouth, Gorham, Islesboro, Kennebunk, Kittery, Lincoln TWP, Lincolnville, Milbridge, Mount Desert Island, North Haven,

Old Orchard Beach, Phippsburg, Portland, Saco, Scarborough, Searsmont, South Portland, Spalding TWR, T3 Indian Purchase, Wells, and Westbrook.

BioDiversity Research Institute is a nonprofit ecological research group dedicated to progressive environmental study and education that furthers global sustainability and conservation policies. The organization believes that wildlife serve as important indicators of ecological integrity.

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Also available for interviews

Steve Mierzykowski, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, contaminant specialist, 207-827-5938, ext. 17
Barry Mower, Maine Dept. of Environmental Protection, contaminant specialist, 207-287-7777
Matt Prindiville, Natural Resources Council of Maine, policy specialist, 207-622-3101, ext. 244
Susan Gallo, Maine Audubon, bird specialist, 207-781-2330, ext. 216
Charlie Todd, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, eagle specialist, 207-941-4468
Karen Young, Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, Casco Bay specialist, 207-780-4820

For a study summary and full report contact Theresa Daigle: theresa.daigle@briloon.org or visit www.briloon.org. Today Wing Goodale will be in Augusta, Maine at the Cross State Office Building Room 214 from 1:00 – 2:00 p.m. and will be available afterwards for interviews upon request.