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Food Habits of Seaducks in the Atlantic Maritimes and Chesapeake Bay

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Food habits of 936 seaducks collected from Atlantic coast areas during 1999-2003 were determined by analyses of their gullet (esophagus and proventriculous) and gizzard. The scoters {black (Melanitta nigra), surf (M. perspicillata), and white-winged (M. fusca)} fed mainly on hooked mussel (Ischadium recurvum) in Chesapeake Bay (0= 52.3%), but blue mussel (Mytilis edulis) was the main food in Massachusetts, Maine, and the coastal Canadian provinces (0= 59.6%). Food of the long-tailed duck (Clangula hyemalis) in the Chesapeake Bay area included amethyst gem clam (Gemma gemma; 53.1%), the dwarf surf clam (Mulinia lateralis; 15.7%) and hooked mussel (5.4%). Common eiders (Somateria mollissima) from five areas in the northeast fed mainly on the blue mussel (86.5%). Benthic sampling in areas where ducks were collected showed a close correlation with food consumed and food available, with the noted exception of the long-tailed duck that fed on gem clam in amounts much greater than other more abundant organisms. This species appears to fill a niche in regard to food habits noticeably different from other seaducks. Understanding the feeding ecology of seaducks in coastal wintering areas will give managers a better understanding of the habitat changes in regard to future environmental perturbations.