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Surf and White-Winged Scoter Growth Trends and Blood Chemistry

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Several field studies have been completed on the breeding biology of surf and white-winged scoters, but little is known about duckling growth and blood chemistry. In 2003, we collected 16 surf scoter eggs in Lac Malbaie, Quebec and salvaged 20 white-winged scoter eggs in Redberry Lake, Saskatchewan to establish a captive seaduck colony in Maryland. A total of 9 surf scoters (87.5% hatchability) and 12 white-winged scoters (70.0% hatchability) ducklings hatched. The length and width of the eggs were similar for both species, but the weights of white-winged scoter eggs were significantly heavier. Hatch weights, however, were similar for both species. All the growth parameters (culmen, tarsus, and weight) exhibited an asymptotic exponential increase over time. The white-winged scoters gained more weight over time than the surf scoter, probably due to genetic differences; white-winged scoters are ultimately larger than the surf scoters. The blood chemistry for both species is similar, which was expected. Surprisingly, surf scoters appear to have a better resistance to aspergillosis, a common disease of captive seaducks, than the white-winged scoters. There are more analyses being completed on comparing the blood chemistry of these two species and also comparing captive and wild ducks wintering in Chesapeake Bay.