

Something is Killing our Bats

White- Nose Syndrome in the Northeast

White-nose syndrome (WNS) in bats was first documented in New York in the winter of 2006-2007 and has now been found in at least 26 hibernacula (caves and mines where bats hibernate) in New York, Vermont, Massachusetts and Connecticut. Tens of thousands of bats have been found dead on the ground, on rooftops and in caves.

In just eight of the affected New York caves, mortality appears to range from 80 to 100 percent.

WNS is identified by fungal growths on the bat's nose, arms and wings, and abnormal behavior such as leaving the hibernaculum in the winter, flying during daylight hours, reduced energy reserves and mortality. Affected and dead bats have very wrinkled wings, and are generally emaciated and severely dehydrated. The fungi which appear on their noses are most likely a symptom and not the cause of mortality. It is unclear what causes the fungi to grow on the bats.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been working on white nose syndrome since early 2008; there is a comprehensive and regularly updated Web site at http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html, including recommendations for cavers as well as anyone else who might find dead or dying bats or observe signs of WNS:

1. Contact your state wildlife agency, email WhiteNoseBats@fws.gov or contact the nearest FWS office at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/offices.html>.
2. If you need to dispose of a dead bat on your property, pick it up with a plastic bag over your hand, double bag it and throw it away. Thoroughly wash your hands.
3. Decontaminate all clothing, footwear and gear that has been in a cave in an affected area any time over the past two years, whether inhabited by bats or not. (Decontamination procedures are included on the Web site.)

Little brown bats are sustaining the largest number of deaths, but the fungus is also affecting Indiana bats, a federally endangered species, as well as northern long-eared, small-footed, and Eastern pipistrelle bats. WNS is in caves and mines that have been visited by thousands of people since the condition was first documented but there are no reported human illnesses attributable to the condition. However, the Fish and Wildlife Service encourages people to use personal protective equipment when entering caves or handling bats in the Northeast.