



# White-nose syndrome in bats



## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### 1. What is white-nose syndrome?

First documented in New York in the winter of 2006-07, white-nose syndrome refers to a white fungus on the noses of many affected bats. The fungus may be a symptom and not the cause of the mortality observed to date. Bats affected with WNS do not always have the fungus, but may display abnormal behaviors (see below). It is unclear at this point if or how WNS is transmitted.

### 2. Where has it been observed?

Biologists and/or cavers have documented WNS in at least 18 bat hibernacula (caves and mines where bats overwinter) in New York, Vermont, and Massachusetts. The number of affected sites identified may increase as additional sites are surveyed.

### 3. What are signs of WNS?

Bats are losing their fat reserves (needed to survive hibernation) long before the winter is over, and they are dying. As the winter continues, we anticipate finding larger numbers of dead bats in the affected locations.

WNS may be associated with some or all of the following observations:

- bats with white fungus on the nose, wings, ears and/or tail;
- bats flying outside during the day in the winter in New York, Connecticut, Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. For states farther south, bats flying outside during the day in temperatures at or below freezing;
- bats clustered near the entrance of the hibernaculum or in areas not normally identified as winter roost sites; and/or
- dead or dying bats on the ground or on buildings, trees or other structures.

### 4. What species of bats are affected?

Eastern pipistrelle, little brown,

northern long-eared, small-footed, and federally endangered Indiana bats have been found with WNS. Big brown bats are typically found in lower numbers in the affected sites, and have not been found exhibiting the symptoms to date.

### 5. What are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state agencies doing to address WNS?

The New York Department of Environmental Conservation, with the assistance of multiple laboratories throughout the country, is spearheading an investigation into the source and possible spread of WNS. The Service and state agencies in the Northeast are collecting survey data to document and track potentially affected sites. The Service is working with the caving community and local cave owners to target potential sites for additional surveys and implement protective measures. In addition, the Service is maintaining a Web page as a central repository for up-to-date information and links to relevant Web sites.

### 6. What should cavers know and do?

The Service and the states request that cavers observe all cave closures and advisories and avoid caves or passages of caves containing hibernating bats. The Service discourages cavers from systematically searching for bats with WNS. We have recommended precautions at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenosemessage.html> to prevent the possible spread of WNS. Local and national cave groups have also posted information and cave advisories on their Web sites.

### 7. What should you do if you find dead or dying bats, or observe signs of WNS?

- Contact your state wildlife agency or your nearest Service field office at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/offices.html> to report your potential WNS observations.
- If you have a camera with you, please take a few photographs of potentially

affected bats (including close-up shots if possible).

- If you need to dispose of a dead bat found on your property, pick it up with a plastic bag over your hand. Place both the bat and the bag into another plastic bag, close it securely, and dispose of it with your garbage. Wash your hands – and any clothing that comes into contact with the bat – thoroughly

### 8. Does the white-nose syndrome pose a risk to human health?

WNS is in caves and mines that have been visited by thousands of people during the past two years, yet there have been no reported illnesses attributable to WNS. However, because we are still learning about WNS, the potential risk to humans from contact with bats affected with WNS is not fully understood, and we are not prepared to advise you about human health risk. As a precaution, the Service encourages the use of personal protective equipment when entering caves or handling bats in the Northeast.

### 9. How does WNS affect endangered Indiana Bat recovery?

We are concerned about the continuing viability of the Indiana bat population in the Northeast. However, until we know more about WNS, we are unable to speculate about its potential impact on Indiana bat recovery. We will continue to monitor affected Indiana bat hibernacula and summer roost sites, and we will determine how to address WNS in the Indiana Bat Recovery Plan.

For more information, go to [http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white\\_nose.html](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/white_nose.html). If you have information about white-nose syndrome in bats for our endangered species biologists, send it to them at [WhiteNoseBats@fws.gov](mailto:WhiteNoseBats@fws.gov).

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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