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White Nose Syndrome – Threatening Ontario’s bats

What is white nose syndrome?

White nose syndrome is a condition that has killed more than a million bats in the northeastern United States. It is dubbed “white nose syndrome” because infected bats often have white fungus on their faces.

The fungus grows on bats while they hibernate in caves and abandoned mines. It seems to irritate and cause bats to waken, so they use their winter fat stores more quickly. They may leave hibernation sites and fly around outside, often in the daytime, when it’s still winter and there are no food sources available.

White nose syndrome was first identified in bats in a cave in New York State in 2006. It has now been found in bats in 14 American states. In 2010, it was detected in central and north-eastern Ontario and in Quebec.

There are no recorded cases of human health issues associated with white nose syndrome. But the syndrome has the potential to devastate Ontario bat populations as it has done in the north-eastern US. So far, there’s no cure or treatment for the syndrome.



Little brown bats hibernate in natural caves and abandoned mines. The one at centre shows signs of white nose syndrome.



This bat, from a cave in the Bancroft area, shows signs of white nose syndrome on its muzzle.

Why are bats important?

Bats are a unique and important part of Ontario’s biodiversity. They also play a vital role in pest control, eating thousands of insects a night.

Eight species of bats are found in this province. Some (those affected by white nose syndrome) hibernate in caves, while others fly as far as the Gulf of Mexico for our winter.

Bats are the only mammal that can fly – as fast as 35 kilometres an hour.

Some Ontario bats can live for 30 years, though most have much shorter lives. They usually have one or two offspring a year.

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What are we doing about white nose syndrome?

The Ministry of Natural Resources is working with the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre to monitor bat populations in caves and abandoned mines where bats hibernate.

We are also working with other Canadian and international partners to learn more about white nose syndrome and determine its impacts on Ontario’s bats.

To help prevent the spread of the fungus, we have advised the public to stay out of known hibernation sites. We are communicating with researchers, wildlife rehabilitators, commercial cave operators and recreational caving groups who may enter abandoned mines and natural caves. We have provided them with guidelines for avoiding bat hibernation sites, using protective gear and disinfection.

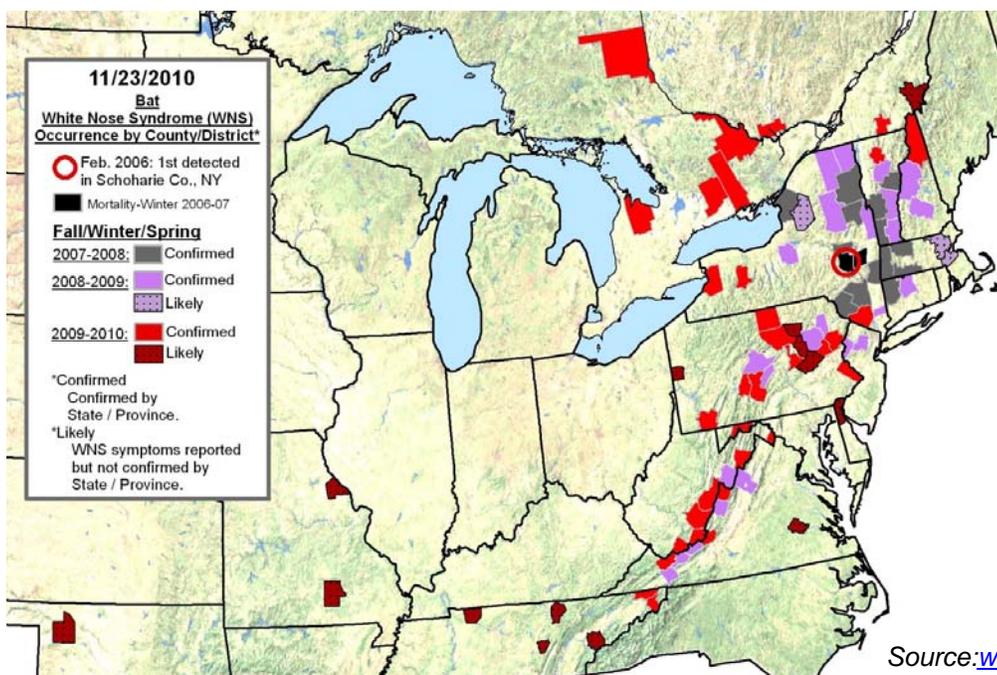
What can you do?

Entering caves or abandoned mines may disturb hibernating bats and reduce their ability to survive the winter. And there’s some evidence that people can spread the fungus that’s linked to the syndrome if they travel to different caves.

To help curb the spread of the syndrome and minimize deaths, stay out of non-commercial caves and abandoned mines where bats may be present.

If you see bats flying during the daytime in winter, or you see dead bats, please contact the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre at 1-866-673-4781, the Natural Resources Information Centre at 1-800-667-1940, or your local MNR office.

Don’t touch bats, whether living or dead, as they can carry rabies.



This map shows how white nose syndrome has spread since it was discovered in New York State in 2006. In 2010, it was discovered in Canada for the first time, in both Ontario and Quebec. The areas highlighted indicate the municipal or county boundary and not necessarily the extent of the disease.

Source: www.fws.gov/WhiteNoseSyndrome