



## OUTDOOR INITIATIVES

# WNS

## White-Nose Syndrome



Above: A healthy Tri-colored Bat, formerly called Eastern Pipistrelle.  
Photo from Outdoor Initiatives

During the winter 2006 / 07 a wildlife health crisis was discovered and documented at four cave sites in eastern New York. The affliction known as white-nose syndrome (WNS) has since spread to eleven states, and into both Ontario and Quebec, Canada. WNS is a cold-weather white fungus evident on the muzzles and wings of affected bats. This newly identified fungus (*Geomyces* sp.) thrives in cold and humid caves and mines. This also happens to be the same cave conditions that many bats thrive in as well. The result being that the bats would wake up from hibernation in the winter months due to the fungus, with the bats going to the front of the cave to find food. What the bats found usually was sub-freezing cold temperatures and snow, no food sources; thus, resulting in the death of the bats likely to starvation. Species of bats affected have included: big brown, Indiana Bats (a Federal Endangered Species), little brown, northern long-eared, small-footed, and tri-colored. Research continues, but researchers have been unable to identify a cause or treatment for WNS. Researchers know of no known risk to humans from contact with WNS-affected bats.

It is believed that WNS is transmitted from bat to bat; however, humans may also carry WNS from cave to cave on their clothing and gear. Thus, bats could feasibly transmit WNS from one location to another during migrations. This may be the case with a Long-Eared Bat afflicted with WNS being discovered in Dunbar Cave, Clarksville, TN early spring 2010. Tennessee State Park immediately closed the cave to all tours.

Through the winter of 2008-09 WNS had spread and been documented in bat hibernacula in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia. That was enough for several federal and state agencies along with organizations and groups to start closing both open and permitted caves to cavers and the general public. Starting in the spring of 2009 and continuing through summer the numerous caves were closed as a prevention to the spreading of WNS, including:

- > Bat Conservation closed all of their caves in the afflicted states and adjoining states.
- > National Park Service closed all their caves and mines in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park.



Left:

**WNS**

(White-Nose Syndrome)

As first discovered in east coast bat population in 2006.

Photo from NSS

- > National Speleological Society closed all of their caves in the afflicted states and adjoining states.
- > USFS (U.S. Forest Service) went a step further closing all their cave east of the Great Plains; this included Arkansas and Missouri.

Early spring 2010 WNS was also discovered in Maryland. The recent discovery of WNS in Clarksville, TN brings the bat health crisis to within a little over 100-miles of Missouri. That's close enough for the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) to likely release its WNS Policy, and likely close some key bat caves late spring or early summer 2010. Missouri initiated a WNS Working Group late winter 2009-10. An Ozark Regional (AR, MO, OK) WNS Working Group has also been initiated as of April 2010. These Working Groups are not just made up of Federal and State Agencies; but, also include: commercial and private cave owners, environmental and wildlife organizations, researchers and wildlife biologist, grottos and other volunteers.

**What can or should each of us do?**

1. Educate yourself via keeping up to date on WNS and what caves are closed.
2. Educate yourself on correct and safe caving procedures.
3. Report to the Missouri Department of Conservation any signs of a white fungus on bats.
4. Follow decontaminated procedures for caving clothes and gear after caving.

To keep up-to-date and for more information on WNS, go to [www.caves.org](http://www.caves.org), click on "Search", under the NSS (National Speleological Society) search engine drop down to and click "White-Nose Syndrome".

"Whether plant or animal, all are part of our natural world. Maybe that is reason enough to give them a fighting chance to survive." - - - John E. Wylie, Missouri Department of Conservation.

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