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Die-off of bats mystifies experts

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By Al Hicks, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation via AP

Bats are dying off by the thousands as they hibernate in caves and mines around New York and Vermont, sending researchers scrambling to find the cause of a mysterious condition dubbed "white-nose syndrome."

STRANGE MARKINGS, BEHAVIORS

"We really don't know what is killing these large numbers of bats," says biologist Jacques Veilleux of Franklin Pierce University in Rindge, N.H. "All we have are symptoms." He says that chiefly they are:

- White fungus on the wings of almost all the affected bats and on the faces of about half.
- Emaciation of the body-fat stores that bats typically live off of during hibernation.
- Clusters of hibernating bats migrating oddly close to cave entrances during winter.
- Starving bats leaving caves during the day in the winter.

By Dan Vergano, USA TODAY

Biologists are stumped by a plague that has killed tens of thousands, and perhaps hundreds of thousands, of bats this year in Northeastern states.

The cause of "white-nose syndrome," so named because of the white fungus that appears on bats' noses and wings, remains a mystery. And the plague is still killing bats, alarming scientists who had considered it a winter syndrome.

"The surprise for us has been finding out that bats are still dying," says biologist Susi von Oettingen of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service office in Concord, N.H. Biologists combing summertime roosts report finding six species of bats affected by the syndrome in New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut, she says.

"I'm continuing to get calls on a daily basis from cities and residents reporting dead bats," says Scott Darling of the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife. Spot surveys are being done in the five states, but conservation officials won't get a solid sense of further losses until later this month when male bats begin returning to caves, Darling says.

One bat can eat more than a pound of night-time insects in a week. White-nose syndrome threatens the endangered Indiana bat, Darling says, and agricultural pest numbers may explode without bats.

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In the winter, ill bats appeared to burn up their stores of fat too early in hibernation; many others left the caves too early and froze to death.

At a meeting of bat biologists in Albany, N.Y., last month, scientists agreed on a research plan to find out whether the syndrome's cause is a fungus, unknown disease or environmental contaminant. They received guidance from bee researchers, who are trying to unravel their own mystery syndrome, called colony collapse disorder, which has devastated the nation's bee population, says microbiologist David Blehert of the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wis.

IN THE CAVES: [Northeast bat population is in its own kind of hell](#)
MORE INFORMATION: [White-nose syndrome](#)

First spotted in four New York caves in 2007, the bat syndrome spread to 24 caves by March, killing 90% of the bats in some locations.

A big worry is that bats, which can travel hundreds of miles in the summer, will spread the syndrome, von Oettingen says. Researchers suspect Pennsylvania may be the next outbreak site.

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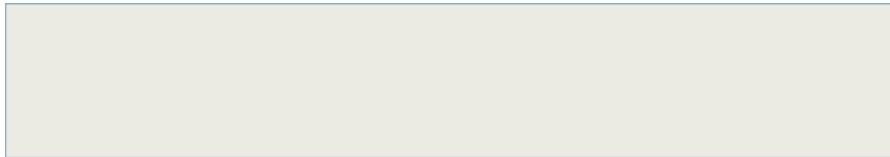
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West Coast wrote: 22h 6m ago

The 10% that survive will breed and be immune to the problem! Adaption at its finest!

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Don R. Blue Dog wrote: 1d 15h ago

BAT_MAN - Like everything else - It's Bush's fault ! hehehehehe. (Okay - maybe not this time.)

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ewhww wrote: 1d 18h ago

Noise pollution should be looked into as a possible culprit.

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John Peters wrote: 1d 21h ago

These Bats have been slowly dying in a collective suicide attempt to try to stop further film productions and the release of the BATMAN series of motion pictures.

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Laundrygoddess wrote: 2d 1h ago

We have pumped enough insecticide into the air killing off their "food", Pollution that is so thick children can not go out to play because the air is sick from gasoline and Ethanol(producing ethanol is worse than gasoline emmissions.),factories that have NO Restrictions.....

We better wake up to the signs that the our brothers and sisters the animals are giving us.

Insects
plants animals
humans

Go back to 9th grade Biology and this time pay attention to your teacher as S/he explains the web of life.

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techspec01 wrote: 2d 1h ago

I LOVE bats - we need them in the ecology and natural balance. Between the bugs eating our trees (Chicago), the bees dying, the bats dying, sharks getting fewer and fewer and polar ice melting all over, this world is going to He((- SOMEONE wakeup and start fixing the bloody problems!

Poor Bats.

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SD_Tony wrote: 2d 1h ago

...sigh

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Loki17 wrote: 2d 2h ago

it must be the Joker, everyone knows he is bats #1 enemy

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1337 nub wrote: 2d 2h ago

look at the bigger picture.... some species throughout time can not handle the environmental changes earth is going through.. so they will naturally die off or evolve... u people crack me up with ur silly antics and theories... this bat thing i do not think can be blamed on Global warming... or bush.... for all of u people with no life... this is something else... i swear.. any event that happens its eather global warming or bush... u people need something new to talk about... seriously...

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1337 nub wrote: 2d 2h ago
bat flu

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