



Parks Canada sets its radar on helping

Bats



Little Brown Bat © Brock Fenton

The facts about bats

Bats are fascinating mammals and one of the most often misunderstood animals on Earth.

- *Bats are important to our well-being, the economy and the environment.*

They provide vital ecological services. All the bats native to Canada are insect-eaters and typically devour half their weight in insects during a single night of hunting for food. Their worldwide value as a natural form of pest control for agriculture and forestry is estimated in the billions of dollars. We can also thank bats for limiting the number of mosquitoes!

- *The expression 'blind as a bat' is actually misleading.*


While eyesight varies according to species, most bats are able to see as well as people do. In the dark they supplement their vision with echolocation – listening to how the clicking sounds they make bounce off their surroundings to situate themselves.

- *Bats do not fly into people's hair.*

When an overhead bat swoops down, it's only to catch insects in mid-air.

The bats in Canada need our help

While there are more than 1,000 species of bats on Earth, only few species are regularly seen in Canada. The health and numbers of several bat species in North America are being compromised by a relatively new disease called white-nose syndrome, which could have catastrophic consequences for at least three Canadian species if no action is taken.



What is white-nose syndrome?

White-nose syndrome is named after a fungus that spreads on a bat's skin and often causes a white fuzzy appearance on the nose, wings or ears. The fungus infects bats during their winter hibernation when their immunity and body temperature are reduced to conserve energy.



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Where is white-nose syndrome?

The fungus, which is thought to have originated in Europe, first appeared within North America in New York State in 2006. It has since rapidly spread throughout Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. If the disease continues to spread at its current rate, all of Canada's hibernating bats could be infected within 12 to 18 years. Experts believe that without action, Canada could lose all of its cave-dwelling bats.

How does white-nose syndrome affect bats?

The fungus causes the bats to wake up more often and/or earlier from their hibernation. With no insects to eat, the bats quickly use up their stored energy and die or emerge from their hibernating sites in poor health when spring arrives. Once the fungus appears within a hibernation site, it spreads quickly from bat to bat and can kill as much as 99% of all the individuals at a site!

Which bats are at risk?

All of North America's hibernating bats are at risk of developing white-nose syndrome. In Canada, three species in particular are facing a rapid population decline:

1. **Little Brown Bat** (*Myotis lucifugus*)
2. **Long-Eared Bat** (*Myotis septentrionalis*)
3. **Tri-colored Bat** (*Perimyotis subflavus*)

On December 17, 2014, an Emergency Listing order was issued to list these three bat species on the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) as endangered species and to provide them with legal protection because of the imminent threats faced by them.

These species can be found within Parks Canada network, along with other hibernating bat species. As the custodian of the largest and most geographically diverse area of federal government land, Parks Canada is uniquely positioned to make a real contribution in terms of bat conservation across Canada.



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What is Parks Canada doing?

The Parks Canada Agency is committed to slowing the spread of white-nose syndrome using the *Canada National Parks Act* and its associated regulations that provide protection for bats and their habitat throughout Parks Canada sites

Parks Canada manages park lands and historic sites that include hundreds of caves and other ideal habitat for bats throughout their life cycle. The ability – and responsibility – of Parks Canada to keep these ecosystems intact and functional helps bats stay healthy and possibly more resilient to threats such as white-nose syndrome.

The Parks Canada Agency collaborates with bat experts to conduct research with the goal of protecting and preserving them.

Parks Canada is taking various concrete actions to help bats that include:

1. Identifying bat hibernation and roosting sites throughout the Parks Canada network.
2. Establishing bat population surveillance protocols for key Parks Canada sites and assessing their health.
3. Tracking the spread of white-nose syndrome in collaboration with [The Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre](#).
4. Implementing decontamination protocols to slow the spread of white-nose fungus during cave research and recreational activities.

What you can do

White-nose syndrome poses no danger to humans, but people visiting caves can unknowingly spread spores from the fungus that are on their clothing, footwear or pets to new areas.

- Try to avoid caves, abandoned buildings and other places where bats may hibernate. If you must enter such places, follow the [Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative](#) (CWHC)'s decontamination protocol.
- If you find a dead bat, please report it to the [CWHC](#) (1-800-567-2033) or your provincial or territorial wildlife agency. Your information could help to track and prevent the spread of white-nose syndrome.
- If you are visiting a Parks Canada site and see a bat at any time, please report your observation to the Parks Canada staff or call 1-888-773-8888.
- Learn about bats and tell your family and friends all about their cool lifestyles. The more people understand how ecologically important bats are, the better!



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