

Bats and White-Nose Syndrome

Bats are mammals that play an important role in the environment. They eat tremendous numbers of insects, can pollinate plants, spread seeds and more. These nocturnal predators can consume nearly half their body weight in insects each night.



But these creatures have been seriously affected by a disease called White-Nose Syndrome (WNS) that has killed millions of bats since its discovery in a single cave in New York in 2006.

WNS has spread through hibernating bat populations in Canada and the United States. In a little more than a decade since this discovery in New York, WNS has been detected in over 30 US states and five Canadian provinces.

Named after a white-fuzzy growth on the nose, ears and wings of some bat species, millions of bats have died since the first discovery in a cave in New York in 2006.

The cause of the infection is a cold-tolerant fungus, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, which thrives in low temperatures (40-55°F) and high humidity conditions like those found in mines and caves where bats hibernate.

The fungus spreads through bat-to-bat contact, bat-to-soil contact or inadvertently by humans carrying the fungus' spores on their clothes or equipment.

During winter hibernation, bats are in close proximity to one another and spores from the fungus are easily spread from an infected bat to those around it. The fungus can also survive in the soil of caves or mines and may infect healthy bats that enter the cave. Cavers may also transfer the microscopic spores from an infected cave to an uninfected one on their clothes or equipment. Clothes, shoes and equipment used underground should always be cleaned through a decontamination process.

Report sick or unhealthy bats to the [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife](#).

Photo by Ryan von Linden, New York Department of Environmental Conservation