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Bats in the News - A Congressional Push for Ailing Bats



Twenty-five federal lawmakers are seeking emergency funding from the U.S. Department of Interior to help scientists seek solutions to White-nose Syndrome, which is blamed for the deaths of more than 1 million bats over the past two winters, *The Star-Ledger* of Newark, New Jersey, reports.

Senators and members of Congress from 13 states signed a letter written by Vermont's congressional delegation to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. "Citing the importance of bats in the North American ecosystem, including their consumption of insects, the letter states that WNS 'has profound public health, environmental and economic implications,' the newspaper said.

(The letter, which did not request a specific level of funding, was dated May 5, about two weeks after BCI urged its members to contact their senators and congressional representatives to request hearings on the WNS crisis.)

"It is clear that threats like WNS have the potential to influence ecosystem function in ways that we currently do not understand," the letter said. "Bats reduce the need for pesticides, which costs farmers billions of dollars every year and are harmful to human health."

Reporter Brian Murray wrote that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released nearly \$1 million through the Pennsylvania Game Commission last month for studies by a team of scientists from New Jersey, New York and other affected states.

WNS has now infected at least nine states, spreading beyond the Northeast to West Virginia and Virginia. Mortality rates of up to 95 percent are reported at some affected hibernation caves.

First detected in 2006 among bats in New York caves, the syndrome was named for a white fungus that is often found on the faces of affected bats. The fungus has been identified, but has not been confirmed as the cause of the syndrome, which interrupts bats' winter hibernation, causing them to burn up crucial fat reserves and, very often, die. Scientists are trying to determine what causes the disorder and how it is transmitted.

BCI helped organize and raise funding for an initial WNS Science Priority Meeting for top scientists in New York last June and is playing a similar role for a second priority-setting meeting May 27-28 in Austin, Texas. You can help support these and BCI's other WNS-related efforts by donating at www.batcon.org/wnsdonate.

You can read a copy of this letter on BCI's website at [here](#).

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