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Bats in the News - Canada's Endangered Bats

White-nose Syndrome is killing Canadian bats in such catastrophic numbers that the federal Environment Minister is being advised to issue an emergency order to declare three bat species endangered, Canada's *Postmedia News* reports. This rapidly spreading wildlife disease poses a "serious and imminent threat to the survival" of the bats, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) concluded on February 27, 2012.



Tri-colored bat © Bat Conservation International

WNS is so deadly that the national committee of wildlife experts called an emergency meeting to assess the situation, the nationwide Canadian news agency said. The committee is recommending an "emergency order" adding the tri-colored bat, little brown myotis and northern myotis to Canada's list of endangered species.

"Although information on bats and the fungal disease is somewhat limited, the evidence of population collapse and rapid spread of the disease is clear," the committee said.

Hibernating bat populations in caves in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes have seen die-offs of 90 to 99 percent, according to reporter Margaret Munro.

"This is one of the biggest events in terms of a massive decline in a common mammal in such a short period of time ever recorded," committee member Graham Forbes of the University of New Brunswick told *Postmedia News*.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently estimated that WNS has killed more than 5.7 million bats in North America since it first appeared in a New York cave in February 2006. The disease or the fungus that causes it has now spread to at least 19 U.S. states and 4 Canadian provinces.

White-nose Syndrome, which does not affect humans, gets its name from the white fungal growths around the nose and wings of most infected bats. It interrupts hibernation, causing bats to use up fat reserves they need to get through the winter. Infected bats often emerge early from hibernation and are seen flying around in mid-winter. These bats usually dehydrate or starve to death, *Postmedia News* said.

"White-nose Syndrome is more than just a bat problem," the Canadian committee added. "Bats provide tremendous value to the economy as natural pest control for farms and forests every year and may play an important role in helping to control insects that spread disease to people."

WNS impacts many species of bats, *Postmedia News* reported, but it is hitting these three species in Canada particularly hard.

The tri-colored bat is relatively rare, the news agency said, but at one hibernation spot in Quebec their number dropped 94 percent over two years, *Postmedia News* said. The little brown myotis historically is a rather common bat, but recent population counts at infected hibernation sites in eastern Canada show declines of 94 to 99 percent within two years of exposure. The committee said the evidence indicates rapid spread and very high mortality among northern myotis.

Your support can help Bat Conservation International's efforts to deal with White-nose Syndrome and other critical threats to bats. Please visit www.batcon.org/donate.

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