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Bats in the News - WNS ~endangers~™ Canadian bats

White-nose Syndrome is killing Canadian bats in such catastrophic numbers that the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada is recommending an emergency order to add three bat species to the nation's endangered species list, *Postmedia News* reports.



Tri-colored bat
© Bat Conservation
International

The wildlife disease, discovered in a New York cave in 2006, is so deadly that it poses a "serious and imminent threat to the survival" of these bats, the committee of wildlife experts concluded after an emergency meeting, according to the nationwide news service. The species are the tri-colored bat, little brown myotis and northern myotis.

Federal Environment Minister Peter Kent would make the decision on listing the species as endangered.

"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*. "This is dramatic." WNS has battered bat populations in four Canadian provinces

In the United States, meanwhile, WNS has been confirmed for the first time in Alabama, the 18th state to be hit by the disease. The *Geomyces destructans* fungus that causes the disease has been found two other states. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now estimates that White-nose Syndrome has killed more than 5.7 million bats in North America. Mortality rates approaching 100 percent have been reported at some bat-hibernation sites.

The committee also warns that the impact of White-nose Syndrome will be felt far beyond bat caves, reporter Margaret Munro writes. "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."

U.S. researchers have estimated the bat die-off will cost North American agriculture \$3.7 billion annually.

The committee says the fungus likely impacts many bat species, but it is hitting these three Canadian species especially hard. They all hibernate in caves or mines, which are cold and damp and hospitable to the WNS fungus.

The tri-colored bat is relatively rare, the committee said, but at one hibernation spot in Quebec their numbers dropped 94 per cent over two years. "The disease risk to the tri-colored bat is considered exceptionally high because it hibernates at temperatures considered optimal for the pathogen and for relatively long periods of time."

The little brown myotis has been quite common, but the committee said recent population counts at infected hibernation sites in eastern Canada show declines of up to 99 percent within two years of exposure, *Postmedia* reports. In the United States, scientists have predicted local extinctions of little brown myotis within 15 years because of WNS.

Northern myotis is also facing disastrously high mortality rates.

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