



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Acadia National Park News Release

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Bat Disease, White-Nose Syndrome, Confirmed in Acadia National Park: Not Harmful to Humans, but Deadly to Bats

White-nose syndrome (WNS), the disease that has recently killed millions of bats in eastern North America, has been confirmed in bats at Acadia National Park in Maine. This is the first confirmation of WNS in Acadia National Park and in Hancock County. White-nose syndrome is associated with a newly discovered fungus, *Geomyces destructans*, and was given this name because, when first discovered, infected bats had white fungus on their muzzles. Once infected, bats become dehydrated, malnourished, and soon die.

"Learning that white-nose syndrome has been documented in Acadia and Hancock County bats is disappointing," said Acadia National Park Superintendent Sheridan Steele. "The National Park Service is working closely with Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the US Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center to implement protective protocols to limit the spread of this fungus in Maine's bat populations. Bats are important because they play a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems and are tremendously important in managing mosquitoes and other biting insects. Losing even a small percentage of Maine's bats could have a devastating effect on one of nature's ecological controls of forest and wetland insects."

"We are more likely to see bats out during the daytime and during seasons when they are not normally active in Maine," added Steele. "We discourage anyone from handling or disturbing roosting bats, as these actions can only further stress individuals and the remaining populations. We encourage everyone to learn more about ways to live safely with bats in Acadia National Park and Maine," said Superintendent Steele. Visitor activities and visitor management operations are not expected to be affected by the recent finding of WNS.

"The fungus does not pose a health risk to humans. Scientists believe humans may transport fungal spores on clothing and gear," added the park's wildlife biologist Bruce Connery, "and the fungus cannot be killed simply by washing clothing and equipment." Managers and scientists are advising that unless people have special training and equipment, they should avoid bat roosting areas to help slow the transmission of the fungus. Maine may join other states that have placed restrictions on working in winter hibernacula and summer maternal roosts.

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"Coastal environments were not thought to have bats in winter and seemed insulated from areas where white-nose syndrome had been found," said Connery. "This year we have been getting reports about bats being active throughout the winter. We tested two bats found in the park this winter and discovered that they had the disease. Our biggest concern is public response to this announcement and being able to clear up the many misconceptions about bats. Bats are highly valuable in the ecological scheme of the park and only if visitors and neighbors work cooperatively with all conservation efforts will the remaining bats be protected in Maine and throughout the Northeast."

The National Park Service suggests following these guidelines to help reduce the spread of white-nose syndrome and protect bats:

- Do not handle alive or dead bats. Keep pets away. Contact a park employee if you observe a bat during the day or see unusual bat behavior. For observations of bats or unusual bat activity outside park boundaries, visit the MDIF&W website at www.mefishwildlife.com or send an email with your questions to ifw.webmaster@maine.gov
- Do not enter caves or mines anywhere during the winter hibernation months (November – April) or attics during the summer maternity months (June through late July). Disturbing bats during hibernation or in maternal roosts can cause bats to use limited energy reserves and could cause mortality in bats that may already be diseased or stressed.
- For the most up-to-date closures and information, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service White-Nose Syndrome web site: <http://www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome>
- If you have bats roosting in structures, allow them to rear their pups and exit the structure at the end of the summer before closing off any entrance holes. Before the following summer, install bat houses to provide bats with a roosting alternative. For information about bat houses, go to the Bat Conservation International website. <http://www.batcon.org/index.php> .

For more information about white-nose syndrome in the National Park Service, visit http://www.nature.nps.gov/biology/wildlifehealth/White_Nose_Syndrome.cfm

Additional information can be found at http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/white-nose_syndrome/index.jsp

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