

White-Nose Syndrome in Bats

Untold numbers of North American bats have died because of **white-nose syndrome (WNS)**, a fungal infection that gets its name from the fuzzy white coating that appears on a bat's wings, face, and nose.

The fungus, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, thrives in the cold and moist locations frequented by many hibernating bats.

Like COVID-19—a new virus for which humans have no natural immunity—our native bats have **no apparent immunity** to this imported fungus. It causes them to wake up several times during hibernation, using up their vital stores of energy.

Although this fungus is **completely harmless to humans**, it has quickly spread throughout much of North America, sometimes by bats and sometimes by humans.

In parts of the continent where habitat fragmentation and pollution have already put stress on populations, WNS has resulted in **bat mortality in the millions** since it was first discovered in 2006. Fortunately it has yet to affect populations in Alberta.

Central Alberta is home to six species of hibernating bats. They winter in exposed rock crevices found in coulees, and in cave systems along the foothills and Eastern Rocky Mountains.

Because the fungal spores easily stick to shoes and clothing and can survive a long journey, spelunkers and others who visit caves can transmit the spores between cave sites.

To reduce this transmission public access to two well-known cave sites in Alberta has been restricted in an effort to delay the arrival of WNS in Western Canada.

Bats are very helpful **pollinators and pest-eliminators**; we have no reason to be afraid of them. Many bat species prefer foraging habitats with dense ground cover and canopy, and plenty of standing dead trees. We should ensure their habitats are in good condition in their time of need.

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Alberta Government Photo

Information about WNS in Alberta:

<https://www.alberta.ca/white-nose-syndrome.aspx>

Canadian researchers try pro-biotic spray to help bats:

<https://www.producer.com/2019/11/solution-proposed-to-fight-bat-disease-threat/>