Photo by: Nancy Heaslip

WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME

White-Nose syndrome (WNS), caused by the fungal pathogen ***Psuedogymnoascus destructans***, is a disease causing mass die-offs of bats at hibernation sites in the U.S. and Canada (90—100 % at some sites). In Delaware, communally hibernating species affected include: little brown bat, big brown bat, tri-colored bat, northern long-eared bat, and possibly small-footed bat. A total of 10 species are affected across the country. An estimated 5.6-6.7 million bats have died from WNS in just six years. No reported human, pet or livestock illnesses have been linked to WNS. No wildlife other than bats have exhibited symptoms of WNS.

P. destructans erodes the bats' skin tissue, and leads to low weight, emaciation, and wing scarring. Characteristic white fungus grows on the muzzle, wings, ears, and tail, although not all bats have visible fungus. Studies show that WNS causes bats to arouse during hibernation more frequently than normal; disrupting physiological processes. Strange behavior can occur at hibernacula, including bats flying outside during the day in winter, clustering near the entrance or flying to their summer colony in winter.

Fungal spores can spread through the substrate, directly from bat-to-bat and have been found attached to materials (like cloth) that have been in affected sites. In addition, migrating bats carry spores hundreds of miles. People could inadvertently be spreading it by visiting affected sites and then unaffected sites.

WNS could result in regional extinctions of some once-common bat species. The disease may soon make its way to some of the largest hibernation sites in the world. The result could be catastrophic. WNS could reduce the reproductive rates of bats who survive lighter infections of the disease, further restricting possible population recovery.

Photo: Delaware Fish and Wildlife

The above information was provided courtesy of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's, Division of Fish and Wildlife. To learn more about bats in Delaware, visit http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov /fw/bats or check out "Delaware Bat Program" on Facebook.

QUICK FACTS

- White fungus grows on muzzle, wings, ears, and/or tails
- Affects communally hibernating bat species
- Causes low weight, emaciation and wing scarring
- Bats arouse more frequently during hibernation & physiological processes are disrupted
- Spreads quickly
- Causes mass die-offs of bat populations
- Has killed ~5.6-6.7 million bats in 6 years

DELAWARE INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL