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State Wildlife Officials Ask Residents to Report Bat Colonies

*Information will be compiled to study effects of
white-nose syndrome*

BOSTON - The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) is asking residents throughout the state to report bat colonies found in houses and other buildings as part of an effort to help biologists study white-nose syndrome (WNS), a recently discovered fungal disease that has caused hundreds of thousands of bat deaths in Northeastern and Atlantic states.

Some species of bats use buildings as their summer roosts, and MassWildlife is asking residents who find colonies of ten or more bats on their property, or in abandoned houses, barns, church steeples or other locations to report that information to department biologists. Biologists will maintain a data base of the information - including the size of the colony, the location and the type of structure the roost is in - to further their study of WNS. Monitoring summer colonies gives biologists an idea of how bat populations are faring from year to year.

Residents should call (508) 389 6300 or email mass.wildlife@state.ma.us.

"White nose syndrome is a serious threat to bat populations in Massachusetts and throughout much of the northeastern United States," said DFG Commissioner Mary Griffin. "We greatly appreciate reports of summer

bat colony activity from Massachusetts' residents so that we can research and better understand the disease and work toward restoration of bat species native to the region."

Little Brown Bats and Big Brown Bats are the most likely species to be found in buildings. Eight species of bats are currently found in Massachusetts and the bats most affected by WNS are the Little Brown Bat, Eastern Pipistrelle and Northern Long-eared Bat. The rare, state-listed Small-footed Bat is also affected by WNS. These bats hibernate in caves or mines. Big Brown Bats, which generally hibernate in buildings, have not been seriously affected.

High bat mortality is a major concern to MassWildlife biologists because bats have a low reproductive rate. Most bats only raise one pup per year and it can take decades for a bat population to rebound after a large die-off. Bats are also important predators of insects such as mosquitoes. A study from Boston University estimates that 14 to 15 tons of insects are consumed each summer by the 50,000 Big Brown Bats that live within the bounds of Route 128.

WNS was first discovered in New York during the winter of 2006/2007 and is associated with a growing number of bat deaths. Dead and dying bats have now been found in unprecedented numbers in and around caves and mines in eight other states, including Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. In some hibernation places 90 to 100 percent of the bats have died.

WNS can be identified by a white, powdery fungus found on a bat's nose, wing and tail membranes or in the fur. The fungus grows at the low temperatures that occur in northeastern caves. Bats with WNS deplete their winter fat reserves too quickly by the middle of winter. The affected bats exhibit unusual behavior, often moving to cold parts of the hibernacula (hibernation site) and leaving the cave or mine during the day and during cold winter weather in an attempt to find food at a time of year when insects are not available.

While the reason for high numbers of deaths in bats with WNS is not fully understood, biologists with state and federal agencies, and other organizations across the country are trying to solve the mystery. One theory is that the fungus is a non-native species from bat caves in Europe that has just recently arrived in North America. European biologists have seen similar fungus on bats in Europe, but have not noted similar bat die-offs.

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) is responsible for the conservation - including restoration, protection and management - of fish and wildlife resources for the benefit and enjoyment of the public. MassWildlife works to balance the needs of people and wildlife today so that wildlife will be available for everyone's enjoyment today and for future generations.

The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is responsible for promoting the enjoyment and conservation of the Commonwealth's natural resources. DFG carries out this mission through land preservation and wildlife habitat management, management of inland and marine fish and wildlife species, and enforcement of the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. DFG promotes enjoyment of the Massachusetts environment through outdoor skills workshops, fishing festivals and other educational programs, and by enhancing access to the Commonwealth's lakes and ponds.

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