

Updates

been wiped out as a result of this infection. Individuals often die with a white ring of fungus on their faces. We know too little about where this fungus came from and why this is happening.

The fungus was first recorded on the east coast of the United States in a cave in the state of New York. Once an individual is infected, the mortality rate of the entire colony nears 100 percent. Reports put the death toll of bats due to this syndrome at at least seven million.

This winter the fungus was discovered in the western U.S. Hikers near Seattle, Washington found an individual on a trail and brought it in for rehabilitation. It died from the effects of starvation soon after.

The disease has spread rapidly and scientists think humans may play a role in transmitting it. Most likely, a caver visited an infected site out east and brought fungus spores on clothes and gear to sites out west. Once there is sufficient buildup of the fungus in the environment, the animals become vulnerable.

The Alberta Bat Action Team (ABAT) is working with researchers, the government, and caving associations to monitor the situation and raise awareness. It is crucial for people to know this is happening if we are to protect a species that plays a vital role in our ecosystems by controlling insect populations and pollinating plants.

ABAT is a member of the Western Bat Working Group. If you see a dead bat or bat flying around during the daytime, please contact the group at wbwb.org/contact as well as Alberta Environment and Parks.

- Esther Bogorov

White-nose Syndrome Is Killing Bats Closer to Home

When bats are infected with white-nose syndrome, they fly during winter and in daylight. This unnatural behaviour leads to their death. Entire bat colonies have