

Bats Need Our Help – Can You Help?

The Ministry of Natural Resources are looking to citizen scientists to help monitor bats. A condition dubbed “White-nose Syndrome” because of a fungus that grows on affected bats, has now killed more than five million bats in eastern North America. In March 2010, the syndrome was confirmed in Ontario. The fungus seems to irritate and cause bats to awaken, so they use their winter fat stores more quickly. They may leave hibernation sites and fly around outside, often in the daytime, when it’s still winter and there are no food sources available. The Ministry of Natural Resources and the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre continue to monitor the spread of the disease and determine its impact on Ontario’s bats.

Bats are an important part of Ontario’s biodiversity. Eight different species of bats are found in this province; the little brown and big brown bats are the most common and both are colonial roosting bats. Ontario’s colonial-roosting bats provide a valuable ecological service as major predators of night-flying insects. A viable bat population provides economic, environmental, and recreational (viewing) benefits.

For these reasons the Ministry of Natural Resources values the information provided through Summer Bat Roost Surveys in which participants count bats at summer roosts. Roost structures can include bat boxes, occupied houses, barns, churches, utility buildings, unoccupied houses, bridges and other structures. Whether roosts are artificial or natural, monitoring summer bat populations is increasingly important because of the spread of White-nose Syndrome. White-nose Syndrome effects on summer colonies are now evident in the southern regions of Ontario. Continued monitoring by citizen scientists is increasingly important to document declines, survival and reproductive success.

The Ministry of Natural Resources has information and registration form packets available to anyone interested in being involved in this important monitoring program. If you would like a copy of this packet, please contact Lesley Hale at lesley.hale@ontario.ca (705) 755-3247 or your local Field Naturalist club.