

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

North Carolina Bat Decline

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The biologists eyed the bat box on the banks of the Tuckasegee River. Counter in hand, they tallied how many bats were using the box. This is the fourth year they've done these counts at a string of bat roosting boxes along the river. And this spring they witnessed a precipitous decline in the number of bats using the sites from past years. The suspected culprit is white-nosed syndrome, the bat disease that has decimated bat populations across Eastern North America.

The disease was first discovered in New York and has spread outward from there over the past seven years. The disease has been confirmed in seven Western North Carolina counties and we're beginning to get a good grip on the extent of its devastation, with some infected locations showing up to a 95 percent decline in hibernating bats over the past one to two years.

The number of bats hibernating in a retired mine in Avery County has plummeted from more than 1,000 prior to WNS to around 65 in just two years since the disease was discovered there. At a mine in Haywood County, the number of bats hibernating dropped from nearly 4,000 to about 250 in only one year. And at a cave in McDowell County, numbers dropped from almost 300 to only a few bats remaining this winter.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.