

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Searching for bat maternity colonies

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

What happened to the Lost Colony at Roanoke? Where is the Lost Dutchman Mine? Did Lee Harvey Oswald act alone? Where do Grandfather Mountain's female bats go in the summer? Tremendous mysteries all.

The caves of Grandfather Mountain serve as a hibernation site, or hibernaculum, for a group of endangered Virginia big-eared bats. What biologists are clueless about is where these bats go when it warms up. All Southern Appalachian bats migrate between their hibernacula and their summer roost sites, which are different for males and females, with females going somewhere to give birth and raise young.

This spring biologists will try to discover the location of the maternity colonies for the rare Grandfather Mountain bats. As bats leave the hibernation cave, a handful of females will be outfitted with tiny radio transmitters. By tracking where they pick up the signals and how strong the signals are, biologists should be able to uncover the maternity colony sites.

However, the landscape around Grandfather Mountain is rough and remote and littered with unknown caves, making tracking that signal especially challenging. Teams of biologists will fan out in cars and on foot to pick up the signal. Four temporary towers will be erected to pick up signals from passing bats. Setting this effort apart from previous, unsuccessful attempts, an airplane will be brought in to track the signal from above, where hopefully it won't be blocked by the rough topography.

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