

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

North Carolina's Endangered Bats

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

2013 marks the 40th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, an anniversary we're marking by taking a closer look at some of the endangered species of the Southern Appalachians.

In the eastern United States, it's hard to talk about bat conservation without mentioning white nose syndrome – the bat disease that's decimating many species as it spreads from the New York area where it was first discovered.

The Southern Appalachians are home to three species of endangered bats – Indiana, gray, and Virginia big-eared. Indiana and gray bats have already seen declines from white nose syndrome.

Biologists recently checked the caves at Grandfather Mountain, which are home to Virginia big-eared bats, and found that, like elsewhere across their range, the big-eared bats were doing fine. It seems they may have a natural immunity to the disease, and indeed, in some places their numbers may be increasing.

Winter hibernation is a convenient time for biologists to check on bats, which are gathered together in large groups. However, this is a very delicate time for bats – if they stir too much, their winter fat stores get used up faster and may not carry them through winter. To minimize the disturbance, biologists enter caves only in very small groups and as rarely as they can while still getting the information they need – once every three years in most cases in western North Carolina.

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