

EXAMINER

Wing and a Prayer

BATS, NATURE'S OWN MOSQUITO ZAPPERS, ARE IN DANGER OF DYING OUT FROM A FAST-MOVING DISEASE.

BY ELIZABETH GEHRMAN

10,000-20,000

ESTIMATED POPULATION OF LITTLE BROWN BATS STATEWIDE IN 2007 (WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME WAS DISCOVERED IN 2006)

20-30
estimated winter population today

400
estimated summer population

8
number of bat species that live in the state (all but 3 get white nose)

600

NUMBER OF INSECTS ONE BAT CAN EAT IN AN HOUR (MOSQUITOES ARE A FAVORITE)



1,455,051 – 2,910,102

ESTIMATED POUNDS OF INSECTS IN THE NORTHEAST THAT GO UNEATEN BY BATS ANNUALLY BECAUSE OF WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME



99.9
PERCENTAGE OF LITTLE BROWN BATS LOST TO WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME SINCE A DEADLY FUNGUS ARRIVED IN MASSACHUSETTS

PUT THE TENNIS RACKET DOWN

If a bat gets into your house, don't kill it — it may be an endangered little brown bat. Instead, open the doors and windows and allow it to fly out. There's no need to contact a wildlife expert unless you see a colony; then, e-mail mass.wildlife@state.ma.us.



“BATS ARE ON THE VERGE OF COMPLETELY DYING OUT... THE DEATH OF OUR BATS WOULD BE CATASTROPHIC TO OUR ECOSYSTEM.”

— BEN AFFLECK **A.K.A. BATMAN**
(GO TO SAVEBATS.ORG TO SEE THE DARK KNIGHT BLUSH AT HIS OWN CHEESY BAT JOKES.)

LIKE KRYPTONITE FOR BATS

White-nose syndrome is a fungus from Europe that scientists theorize came to the United States on the gear of a spelunker. European bats are not affected by it, but it kills many species of American bats; it destroys wing tissue and causes the bats to wake more often in winter, depleting their fat reserves until they die. The death toll since 2007 is 5 million to 6 million. “The good news is that the less than one half of one percent that survived may have a genetic level of immunity to it,” says Tom French, assistant director of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. “So we hope the survivors will be the seed for recovery.”



SOURCES: MASSACHUSETTS AUDUBON SOCIETY; US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY; MASSACHUSETTS DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE; SAVEBATS.ORG; PHOTOGRAPHS: HANGING BAT BY ALEXEI ZAYCEV; AFFLECK BY CHRIS PIZZELLO/INVISION; MOSQUITO FROM SHUTTERSTOCK; DISEASED BAT BY MARVIN MORIARTY/AP/US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE