

They call it a 'bat apocalypse.' The fungus causing it is spreading across Texas

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The fungus that kills bats showed up in Texas only two years ago, but now it is marching across the state

So far, no cases of white-nose syndrome have been discovered in Texas.

But it usually takes two to four years before the fungus starts causing white-nose syndrome, said Jonah Evans, a Texas Parks and Wildlife mammalogist.

Texas Parks and Wildlife announced this week that the fungus was found in 22 sites in 16 counties in 2019. Eleven of those counties are new and it has now been found in 21 Texas counties.

The fungus' spread across the U.S. has led some scientists to warn that it could lead to a regional extinction of some bat species. The syndrome gets its name from the white fuzz found on the noses of infected bats as they overwinter in caves.

Last year, National Geographic went so far as to warn that a bat apocalypse is unfolding.

The syndrome disrupts bats during hibernation.

"It causes them to wake up multiple times while they are hibernating," Evans said. "It depletes reserves and the bats die off from starvation or go in search of food and then they die."

Will the same thing happen in Texas?

Another warm weather state, Mississippi, has had the fungus longer than Texas but hasn't seen white-nose [syndrome](#) develop.

"There's a lot we still don't know about," Evans said.

Texas has 33 species of bats and officials estimate [white-nose syndrome](#) could harm eight of them. In Texas, the fungus has been detected on 43 cave myotis, 13 Mexican free-tailed bats and four tri-colored bats.

"Based on their track record in other states, we're certainly worried," Evans said, referring to tri-colored bats.

It's uncertain how Mexican free-tailed bats, the most common in Texas, will fare.

"Since the free-tailed bat doesn't hibernate, it may not impact them," Evans said. "The downside is they may be a vector for spreading the [fungus](#) since free-tailed bats are found as far south as Chile and Argentina and along the Eastern seaboard of the U.S."

Arlington resident Kate Rugroden is chairwoman of the White-nose Syndrome Stakeholders Committee and vice president/treasurer at Bat World Sanctuary in Weatherford. She said bats are vitally important to the ecosystem and the economy.

One brown bat, which is about the size of a human thumb, can eat 4 to 8 grams of insects per night, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. A 2011 Science magazine report estimated the value of [bats](#) to agriculture could be between \$3.7 billion and \$53 billion per year.

"Bats are essential to life," Rugroden said. "They are a keystone species.

They have a huge job to do."

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