

Deadly white-nose syndrome confirmed in Texas bat for first time

March 6 2020, by Roberto Villalpando, Austin American-Statesman

A case of the deadly bat disease white-nose syndrome has been confirmed in a Texas bat for the first time, biologists announced Thursday.

Until now, only the fungus that causes the [disease](#) had been detected in Texas. White-nose [syndrome](#) has been a national concern because it has killed millions of hibernating bats in the eastern United States, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists say.

The infected animal, a type of bat called a cave myotis, was found dead in Gillespie County on Feb. 23. Gillespie County is in the Hill Country and is home to Fredericksburg.

The bat tested positive for the disease and for the fungus, according to the TPWD.

"Finding WNS in Central Texas for the first time is definitely concerning," bat specialist Nathan Fuller said in a statement from TPWD. "Biologists had hoped that [white-nose syndrome](#), a disease that thrives in cold conditions, might not occur in warmer parts of Texas."

Fuller said biologists are following up on other reports to determine whether the case is an isolated incident or if the threat of disease is more widespread.

"We recently received a report from a site in Bell County of five cave

myotis that we suspect were infected as well," Fuller said. "We should know more in the next few weeks."

White-nose syndrome is a [fungal disease](#) only known to occur in bats and is not a risk to people, the TWPD said.

White-nose syndrome irritates bats' faces and wings, which causes them to wake up through the winter during hibernation. Being awake burns off critical fat reserves needed to survive the winter, causing the animals to starve to death.

Mexican free-tailed bats, whose largest urban roost is under the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge, typically migrate and stay active through the winter. That means free-tailed bats likely won't be killed off by the disease, but they could spread the fungus to other areas across the United States and into Central and South America.

Travis County, where more than a million Mexican free-tailed bats roost in downtown Austin, was free of the fungus during surveying in 2019. But neighboring Hays County was among the latest to detect the [fungus](#), along with a cluster of surrounding counties.

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