

GUIDELINES FOR DISEASE REPORTING FOR SOUTHERN BENT-WING BATS

Information for cave explorers, cave researchers and cave managers

What is disease surveillance and why is it important?

Southern bent-wing bats are critically endangered, with population numbers having declined sharply over the last few decades. We are concerned about disease as a potential contributor to future population declines, including, **but not limited to**, the devastating fungal disease [White Nose Syndrome](#) (see also [Wildlife Health Australia Fact Sheet](#)), which is currently thought not to occur in Australia.

Engaging in disease surveillance means being on the constant lookout for disease outbreaks, through examining live and/or dead bats, testing for diseases and determining cause of death where possible. Early detection gives us the best chance at managing such outbreaks before they have significant or irreversible impacts on populations.

Caves are the most likely place to observe diseased bats. While some bat caves are visited regularly by rangers and researchers, many bat caves may only be visited by recreational cave explorers. Both recreational and professional cave visitors are therefore key people to assist with bat-disease surveillance.

What should I be looking for?

Bats can carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans, including Australian Bat Lyssavirus. **It is therefore important that you DO NOT HANDLE ANY DEAD OR ALIVE BATS.**

Please look out for southern bent-wing bats (or any other bats) with the following features:

- groups of dead bats (three or more dead bats found in close physical proximity to each other)
- ongoing bat deaths (three or more bats found dead within days of each other)
- live bats that show abnormal behaviour, e.g. adults that can't fly, flying outside the cave during the day
- live and dead bats with external signs of disease, e.g. abnormal skin (powdery material, scabs, lumps, ulcers) or wing damage (discolouration, flakiness, holes)

What should I do if I find something?

If you find any bat that is sick or injured and still alive outside of a cave, please contact the local wildlife care organisation or a local veterinarian. Remember that you **MUST NOT HANDLE THE BAT.**

To report dead or alive bats with the features outlined above inside a cave, contact one of the below:

- Your local [State Wildlife Health Australia \(WHA\) Coordinator](#):
- The 24 h [Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline](#) on Freecall 1800 675 888

If you are caving in a national park or reserve and discover dead or alive bats with the features outlined above, **please also immediately contact the local parks ranger office:**

- Local parks ranger office
 - Mt Gambier
 - 11 Helen Street, Mount Gambier 5290
Phone: 8735 1177; email: lc.npws@sa.gov.au
 - Naracoorte
 - Wonambi Road, Naracoorte 5271
Phone: 8760 1203; email: lc.npws@sa.gov.au
 - Any cave within Victoria
 - Call DELWP call centre on 136 186

Please record and report:

- Exact location and name of the cave
- Location of the observed bat(s) in the cave (a map/diagram would help greatly)
- Date and time of the observations
- Other details if known (number of bats affected, species, unusual behaviour)
- Take photographs
- Your name and contact details

NOTE: It is important that you do not spread disease organisms to other caves. If you have observed a potential disease event, you must not visit other caves until you have been advised that it is safe to do so.

Examples of suspicious signs of disease:



Bat with furry growths (White Nose Syndrome in this example) on wings and head in North America (Image: Patuxent Wildlife Research Centre)



Bat with scabby lesions on wings (caused by infection with mite in this example) (Image: Holz et al. 2019, Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine. 50: 966-971)