



Wendy Whynot, who runs a toll-free batline, observes the newly discovered bat colony. **Communications Nova Scotia**

Discovery of a bat colony

Biologists make surprise find of 300 healthy, promiscuous bats

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A colony of healthy bats has been found in Nova Scotia, providing hope for the at-risk population.

Nearly 300 healthy female brown bats and their young were discovered by Natural Resources staff in the last week of June.

They're now the largest known maternity colony in the province.

Their nesting site is being kept top secret, out of concern for the diminishing population.

"It gives us hope that there are sites out there that are unknown and undiscovered," said Mike

Elderkin, the provincial species-at-risk biologist who helped discover the colony.

Bats are at risk in eastern North America due to a deadly disease known as white-nose syndrome. So far, it has killed about seven-million bats across the continent.

On Thursday, Elderkin said that this has led to a roughly 98-per-cent decline in a number of species including the northern long-eared, tri-coloured and little brown bats.

He says the recovery of these endangered species will now depend on the number of females that have survived the disease.

"These bats are very promiscuous," said Elderkin. "So it doesn't take a lot of males to father

young."

Bats may be known to many as pesky creatures that nest in attics. But they're also helping the environment and economy.

The tiny mammal eats up to half its weight in insects every night, doubling as cost-effective pest control.

Elderkin says their diet consists of nocturnal insects such as mosquitoes and moths.

But their nocturnal and mysterious lifestyle also make it difficult for scientists to see and measure their biological development.

In an effort to try and return to a healthy bat population, the province is asking Nova Scotians to help track bats by reporting sightings.

"It's very clear that the public involvement is pivotal to recovery," said Elderkin.

Residents can visit the website www.batconservation.ca or call 1-866-727-3447 toll free.

Elderkin says reporting repeat sightings is just as important. "It tells us where there is a persistence and where the bats seem to be established."

Since the phone line's inception a couple years ago, he says calls from the public have provided necessary insight.

"Everyone has a bat story," said Elderkin. "And they sure step forward to try and share that information in a constructive way."