

Feb. 26, 2009

On Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2009, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation biologists (Chris Hobson and Wil Orndorf) and I entered Breathing Cave and found several signs of an early stage of WNS outbreak. The bats were roosting in their normal areas and most were in typical hibernation states. A few were awake and active with 10% to 15% of the little brown bats showing fungal growths around their muzzles, on forearms and wing membranes. The only mortalities we found involved three eastern pipistrelles. Other species were noticed but did not appear to be affected.

Based on our observations the owners of Breathing Cave have closed the cave. They have also given us the waivers from the metal box, on the tree, in their yard, in an attempt to trace the possible movement of the fungal spores from Breathing Cave to other caves.

If you were in Breathing Cave between September 15, 2008 and the present please email me at: caves@htcnet.org with the names of any subsequent caves you visited.

Please disinfect your caving gear according to the decontamination procedures at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenosemessage.html#containment>

The Highland County Cave Survey has asked its members to take a short sabbatical from caving until we can sort out the implications of WNS to the north and now to the south of us. I am also asking all those who cave or have caved in Bath or Highland counties during this hibernation season to also pause until we can trace the possible movement of the spores from Breathing Cave.

This is a very bad situation and we need your help.

Rick Lambert
Highland County Cave Survey