

Northeastern Cave Conservancy News



The Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. (NCC) is a not-for-profit corporation committed to the conservation, study, management, and acquisition of caves and karst areas having significant geological, hydrological, biological, recreational, historical or aesthetic features. To these ends, the NCC combines the resources and expertise of affiliated cave explorers, educators, scientists, landowners, and conservation officials.

Next Board Meeting

Sunday, September 21st 10AM in the Schoharie area (exact location TBA).

- 9) The board is looking for people interested in helping to write grants towards the fundraising effort for the purchase of Merlin's Cave.

Notes from the March Board Meeting

- 1) Board discusses NCC caves and decides to keep the May 15th cave re-opening date for the time being, pending further recommendations by the DEC/US F&W.
- 2) Al Hicks reports that it is pretty clear that WNS is spread by bats, but not completely known if humans are also helping to spread it.
- 3) Hay reports that the BZ foundation is dissolving and donating their funds to the NCC.
- 4) Knox managers report that a new Knox specific sign has been posted at the parking area to explain how to get a parking pass, as well as a sign at the sinkhole stating guidelines for entry.
- 5) Davis reports that KWI will be donating \$100 to the NCC.
- 6) Porter reports that the owner of Red Bat Cave in Berkshire County, MA is interested in donating that cave to the NCC, but it would require incorporation in MA.
- 7) The board is looking for a membership chair.
- 8) The board voted to pay up to \$100 for two people to attend the MHLC annual banquet.

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<p>The Northeastern Cave Conservancy News is published quarterly by the Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. The Northeastern Cave Conservancy promotes the study and preservation of speleologically significant properties in the Northeastern United States. Annual membership is \$15 (Regular), \$5 addtl. (Family), \$10 (student), \$50 (Benefactor), and \$100 (Institutional). All checks made payable and sent to:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Northeastern Cave Conservancy, Inc. P.O. Box 254 Schoharie, N.Y. 12157</p> <p style="text-align: center;">www.necaveconservancy.org</p>		

NCC Recent Activity by Bob Addis

Carlisle Karst Tour – Mike Chu and I led nearly 40 people on a driving tour of the caves and karst of the Town of Carlisle on June 1st. It was sponsored by the Carlisle Historical Society and they once again expressed their appreciation of the NCC contribution of a sizeable chapter in their bicentennial book on caves last year. Thanks to Chuck Porter and Jay Siemion for that! We stopped at McFails, Doc Shauls Resurgence, road stop at Barracks Zourie and ended at Sellecks.

From this tour the NCC has been invited on a hike up privately-owned Barracks Zourie in the near future, a view not to be missed! As always with these public gatherings, we get inquiries, sometimes cave leads and permission/invites, and interest in our program of cleaning up sinkholes.

Clarksville Heritage Day, August 2nd - Stop by and support the firemen's breakfast, car show, and later a chicken BBQ if you are caving in the area that day. Other events are planned and the NCC probably will have some presence (poster, surface tour?).

White Nose Syndrome – Peter Youngbaer has been extremely busy in the task of liaison for the cavers with the researchers and he has been assisted by Mike Warner. Please see his article in this issue for details on the recent WNS Science Strategy Conference.

The NCC is looking for a representative to the Cave Conservation and Management Sessions of the 2008 NSS Convention. The individual is asked to report on the sessions at the fall NCC meeting and submit Volunteer Value data for their trip (mileage, drive time, time at sessions, etc). Please contact me if you are interested.

**White Nose Syndrome
Science Strategy Conference
Albany, NY June 9-11
by Peter Youngbaer**

Day One - Impressions

Nearly 75 people gathered here in Albany to present their work to date on White Nose Syndrome, and to try to figure out a strategy for attacking the problem.

Listening to all the presenters, and participating in the Q & A periods following each presentation, one could not help but be impressed with the wealth of knowledge and commitment from such a wide variety of people from across the country.

While I will be preparing more detailed reports on the sessions (in the days following the conference), some things are clear:

- We still don't know what is causing White Nose Syndrome
- Many lines of scientific inquiry are open, but there are few leads
- There is really a lack of sufficient base line data on some of the leads and on the bats themselves, including population numbers.
- While the typical news story boilerplate language says something to the effect that the scientists don't believe the white nose fungus is killing the bats, which has definitely not been ruled out. In fact, a new strain of fungus (of the many different varieties that have been found on the bats) has been isolated in the past two weeks, and many of the scientists are clearly concerned that the fungus/fungi are playing a role in either directly or indirectly weakening the bats.
- Bats out of hibernation now are being seen in maternity colonies, and from emergence surveys, and they are not healthy. Most prevalent are wing damage signs, including tears, holes, dryness, and white blotches.

Listening to the detailed presentations on the lab work that is being done, you learn about how long it takes to do the different experiments, isolating

various bacteria, fungi, parasites, viruses, etc., Results must then be verified by second laboratories before conclusions can be drawn and published. The protocols need to be tight and consistent in order to have validity. The field samples (live or dead bats or tissues) must be consistently collected in statistically valid numbers.

It is interesting having the scientists and the agency personnel (called managers at this conference) and the cavers, in the same room, mixing and learning from each other.

One highlight of the day was the presentation by two of the lead researchers working on the bee Colony Collapse Disorder. Many have noted similarities between CCD and WNS, and they, too, made that observation. CCD is about a year and a half into its scientific inquiry, so we are not that far behind with WNS. They spoke not only of the phenomenon, but mostly on how the field people, beekeepers, scientists, and agency bureaucrats have organized to work on the issue, including their interface with Congress, which ultimately provides the bulk of the money for research, along with professional trade organizations (honey producers and users and those in the agricultural community who depend on the bees economically).

Bottom line of day one was a feeling of energy and collective commitment to solving the mystery of White Nose Syndrome.

Day Two – Brief

The second day of the conference was very different than day one. The group was split into researchers and managers. I spent the first quarter of the day with the managers, then the balance of the day with the scientists. They are very different in many ways, and while not totally fair, the words "theoretical" and "practical" broadly define the camps.

The scientists/researchers were charged with developing the primary hypotheses, and then action plans for each of them. The large bullets that evolved from the day are:

Hypothesis One: Change in body condition (starvation/dehydration)

- 1a. Inadequate quantity/quality of body fats
- 1b. Early depletion of fat store
- 1c. Water balance

Hypothesis Two: Direct mortality from pathogen (virus/parasites low priority; bacteria/fungi high priority)

Hypotheses Three: Effects of contaminants (looking at sublethal effects, such as changes in immune functions, arousal patterns, behavior, effects of pesticides on food supply)

Hypotheses Four: Multifactorial causation.

A detailed chart was developed for each of these, which we plan to post once it is available.

The managers group goal for Day Two was to develop a coordinated strategic response among state and federal fish and wildlife agencies. They began with a “lessons learned” presentation from the two bee Colony Collapse Disorder leaders.

Their discussions then focused on three areas:

1. Determining bat population effects
2. Geographic distribution and spread of WNS
3. Public outreach and information

There was a defined immediate need for a field diagnostic – meaning a clear set of indicators by which someone can determine that WNS is present. It is important to know that there is not yet a clear definition of just what WNS is – just a set of observations (fungus, weight loss, starvation, behaviors).

There was also a lot of discussion (in both groups) about decontamination protocols – for field researchers, licensed bat professionals, cavers, and lab researchers. More on this will come in the detailed report.

At the end of the day, several of us were dining and discussing our impressions, and we uniformly expressed frustration with the seeming lack of progress on determining the cause of WNS, and the difference of approaches between the field and lab folks.

The goal for day three is to blend these two groups’ work together and form a strategic plan and coordination model.

Upcoming Events

July 19, 2008: NCC sinkhole cleanup at Paul and Al's property

July 26, 2008: NCC cleanup at Surprise Cave

August 2, 2008: Clarksville Heritage Day

August 11-15, 2008: 2008 NSS Convention, in Lake City, Florida.



Carlisle historical society tour of McFails Nature Preserve, Sellecks Karst Preserve, and Doc Shauls area. Tour given by Bob Addis, photo by Mike Chu.