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Endangered Indiana Bats Found in North Carolina for First Time in More Than a Decade

Discovery offers hope for rare bat species affected by deadly disease

Biologists with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC), U.S. Forest Service and Brown Environmental made an unexpected discovery earlier this year while searching the Nantahala National Forest in Graham County for bat colonies that may have survived a deadly disease known as white-nose syndrome.

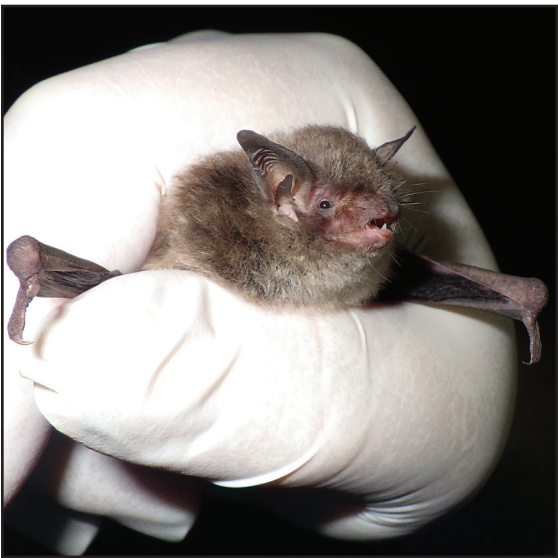
During mist netting surveys, researchers captured Indiana bats, a federally endangered species that had not been captured in North Carolina surveys since 2015.

“We had recently captured little brown bats, another WNS-susceptible species, in the area and expanded our survey effort in the hopes of catching more little brown bats and possibly other WNS-survivor species,” said NCWRC Bat Biologist Katherine Etchison. “What the

researchers didn’t expect to encounter were Indiana bats.”

Despite their name, Indiana bats are not limited to Indiana and are native to several eastern states. However, populations have declined significantly, especially due to white-nose syndrome, leaving wildlife experts uncertain whether any remaining colonies existed in North Carolina.

The discovery was especially meaningful for researchers who have spent years searching for the rare species. “It was a surprise for sure and was so fulfilling after spending a decade on surveys that didn’t result in Indiana bat captures,” Etchison said. “We always hope we’re going to catch this species, and we put in the work to catch



them, but they’re just so rare nowadays.”

The recent captures were the result of extensive scouting, acoustic surveys and mist netting efforts focused on finding bat colonies that have survived white-nose syndrome. Researchers were able to capture five reproductive female Indiana bats.

Two of the bats were equipped with radio transmitters and tracked to a maternity roost located in a dead eastern hemlock tree in the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness Area.

Researchers counted 24 bats leaving the roost at sunset.

Plans are now underway for future monitoring and research to learn more about this important Indiana bat colony. “This was a big find for us,” Etchison said. “So, we’re thinking ahead to the steps we can take to learn more about this Indiana bat colony.”

Scientists do not know exactly how many bats are surviving white-nose syndrome in North Carolina, but researchers focus on population trends rather than exact numbers because bat populations are difficult to estimate.

Bats Benefit Humans Indiana bats have been listed as federally endangered since 1967. The small bats are typically 3 to 3.5 inches long, with a wingspan of 9.5 to 10.5 inches, and weigh less than half an ounce. They are beneficial to the environment, consuming large numbers of insects each year and providing important ecosystem benefits to agriculture. They also help with pollination and seed dispersal.

White-nose syndrome has caused an estimated 6.7 million bat deaths since it was first identified in 2006. The disease was first detected in North Carolina in 2011 and affects seven bat species. The impacts have been especially severe in the mountains, while Piedmont bat populations have not shown declines and the disease has not been found in the Coastal Plain.

Wildlife officials say the Indiana bat discovery provides an encouraging sign that some colonies may be adapting and surviving despite the challenges posed by white-nose syndrome.

Ansonia Announces Upcoming Production of *Grey House*

Arts Council Board approves psychological thriller after thoughtful discussion

The following is a release from the Ansonia Theatre: The Anson County Arts Council Board of Directors recently faced one of the most challenging artistic decisions in the organization’s history while discussing the upcoming production of *Grey House*.

Unlike the heartwarming musicals and family-friendly productions audiences have come to expect at the Ansonia Theatre, *Grey House* is an unsettling psychological thriller featuring intense themes, disturbing imagery and frequent harsh language. The production includes a cast of four adults and five young performers ranging in age from 10 to 18, adding another layer of thoughtful discussion among board members.

Several board members expressed concerns about whether the production would be appropriate for the theatre’s traditional audience. Discussions centered on the show’s language, mature content and whether patrons would be prepared for the emotionally intense experience presented by the script.

Director Tommy Wooten, known for selecting productions that challenge audiences while respecting the community, strongly advocated for presenting the play as written.

“*Grey House* is meant to feel like a nightmare,” Wooten said. “It’s uncomfortable. It’s unsettling. It asks difficult questions and refuses to provide easy answers. If we soften the language or dilute the themes, we lose what makes the play such a powerful piece of modern theatre.”

After a respectful and thorough discussion, the Board voted to move forward with the production, agreeing that the Arts Council has a responsibility not only to entertain but also to present meaningful works that challenge audiences.

However, the decision comes with an equally strong message: This production is not intended for everyone.

The Arts Council is encouraging parents, families and anyone who may be sensitive to strong language, disturbing subject matter or psychologically intense storytelling to carefully consider whether *Grey House* is the right production for them. While the young actors involved have been supported throughout the rehearsal process, the material itself is intended for mature audiences.

The Arts Council also advises that children should not attend this production.

Organizers say the goal is to provide audiences with clear expectations so everyone can make an informed decision before purchasing tickets.

For those who enjoy thought-provoking theatre that pushes boundaries, *Grey House* promises to be unlike anything previously presented on the Ansonia stage. For others, there will be additional opportunities throughout the season to enjoy productions better suited for family audiences.

Sometimes theatre comforts us. Sometimes it makes us laugh. And sometimes, as *Grey House* intends to do, it leaves us looking over our shoulder long after the curtain falls.

Auditions for *Grey House* will be held Tuesday, July 28, at 6:00 p.m. at the Ansonia Theatre.

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