

BEXARfacts



Monthly Newsletter March 2009

WHITE NOSE SYNDROME

By: Peter Youngbaer

Dear Cavers, White Nose Syndrome has killed hundreds of thousands of bats throughout the northeastern US. This winter, it has now been confirmed in several new states: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New Hampshire, West Virginia, and Virginia. Wildlife officials in Illinois have closed all but one of their caves to the public and further reports are likely before the end of winter. What had been limited to the northeast is quickly becoming a far more national issue.



Little Brown Bat hibernating in a WV cave has white ring of the fungal genus *Geomyces* around its nose and on its ears. Image © 2009 by Craig W. Stihler, Ph.D.

A year ago, the NSS Board of Governors created a White Nose Syndrome Liaison. As that person, my responsibilities have been to act as the connection between the NSS and the research and management communities. A website that is regularly updated with the latest information about the spread of WNS and the ongoing research can be found by going to the NSS homepage (www.caves.org <<http://www.caves.org>>) and clicking on the white-nosed bat at the bottom of the menu, or by going directly to: <http://www.caves.org/WNS/WNS%20Info.htm>.

Many people have asked about material that they can use to show at grotto meetings or to share with public groups, such as scouts, camps, churches, and other outing groups. The website above has a link to an excellent PowerPoint presentation put together and regularly updated by Al Hicks, endangered species mammologist with the NY Department of Environmental Conservation, one of the leading WNS researchers. It is public domain and is made available to you to copy, turn into a CD, and share to help spread the word.

Below is a link to an excellent, in depth, and up-to-date report on WNS including the latest research findings. It includes photographs from West Virginia, and interviews with several of the leading WNS researchers. Some of what they report was discussed at length in a national WNS webinar on February 20 in which over 45 university and laboratory researchers, federal and state wildlife officials, and ngos BCI and the NSS participated.

<http://www.earthfiles.com/news.php?ID=1529&category=Environment%3Ehttp://www.earthfiles.com/news.php?ID=1529&category=Environment> <<http://www.earthfiles.com/news.php?ID=1529&category=Environment%3Ehttp://www.earthfiles.com/news.php?ID=1529&category=Environment>>

As cavers and cave conservationists across the country are unfortunately becoming more personally affected by the reach of WNS, it is important to re-emphasize the need to clean and decontaminate clothing and gear. The USFWS has protocols on this for cavers and researchers working with bats which can be found at: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/whitenosemessage.html>. Please know that we understand these protocols are challenging and inconvenient. They are being examined for better efficacy, and to balance the biological containment needs with safety, have been updated, and are likely to change again as more is learned about WNS. Please check the site regularly before caving.

A number of states have suspended their regular winter bat surveys in order to prevent further spread of WNS as much as possible, and to permit hibernating bat colonies under stress from being disturbed further. While it may be likely that WNS will continue to spread on its own - bat to bat - we can do our part to help slow it down, possibly buying time for the research to catch up. *Cave clean, cave safely, and cave softly.* Thank you.

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2009 GUIDEBOOK SALE

The NSS Office is in full Spring Cleaning mode! Due to overstock on most of the previous guidebooks, Convention Guidebooks are now 50% off in the NSS Bookstore. Order early because supplies are limited. This offer excludes the 2008 Convention Guidebook, but all others are priced to move. The offer is good until April 30, 2009. Phone 256.852.1300 or go online to www.nssbookstore.org

MEMBER HIGHLIGHT

Carl Ponesbshek sits against the wall of every Bexar Grotto meeting, and I had a feeling he would be a wealth of caving stories. I was right and I was wrong. Carl, who began caving when he was seven, has not only done a *lot more* than caving, he has done a *lot for* caving. As a child his father told him about the beautiful caves he used to explore in his native Slovenia. After immigrating to America in 1906, his father eventually settled in Ohio working as an organizer for the American Miners' Association. The mine company had over 2000 acres and the owner was kind enough to allow his father to take Carl and his brother Jack to explore the land and enter the caves they found. They would enter the caves with carbide lamps, and clothesline for rappelling and climbing.

Carl first attended college at the University of Pittsburgh where he joined a grotto and did a some caving in the Pittsburgh and West Virginia region. His grotto found several caves and a couple of them eventually became show caves, one being Laurel Ridge.

Although he had a scholarship, he also had a car and a girlfriend, and "since both were expensive" he worked for a mining company, monitoring the pumps and other machinery. Working the 2nd shift from 7 to 11 PM, Carl did his homework in the mines using his carbide Mine Safety Lamp.

Carl continued working for the mine for several years after graduating. When he married, he took his wife caving on their honeymoon. It was the first and only time she ever went into a cave.

Working in the mine one day, the roof began collapsing in front of him. Horrified, he saw the supports snapping like matchsticks and instinctively, he threw himself under the caterpillar tracks, which were built about 2 feet off the ground. This quick response saved his life. He was able to establish contact with the surface and was rescued within six hours, but from head to toe was covered with coal slivers that penetrated his skin. Showering got most of them out, his wife got the rest with the tweezers.

After serving in WWII, Carl stayed with

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SISTEMA PURIFICACION

There is a standing invitation for cavers to visit the Sistema Purificacion--primarily the upper end--over spring break this year in order to get familiar with the cave and to introduce people to the Project. The aim is to get new cavers involved in mapping and exploration of some 1800 (or so) unchecked leads in the 90 kilometer long system.

La Sistema Purificacion is the deepest cave in the Western Hemisphere. Located in the Sierra Madre Oriental, it is not yet fully explored, but is known to be over 87 kilometres long.



The Purificación karst area straddles the border between the southern parts of the Mexican states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León. It comprises the front ranges of the Sierra Madre Oriental which rise from an elevation of 400 meters at Ciudad Victoria to an altitude of 3500 meters on Cerro el Viejo, the area's highest peak. To date over

400 caves have been located in the project area with the longest, Sistema Purificación now over 97 kilometres long and nearly one kilometre deep.

There is a lot of surface work to do as well so adventurous camp followers should not be discouraged. We are currently working on the fieldhouse performing an emergency stabilization project. Ediger intends to be there for the spring break season in order to accommodate various caving groups and to have camping areas available if work on the fieldhouse isn't completed.

Dates, maps and more info will be available when we know more on who is coming and when. We will try to adjust our schedule to meet the vacation time of caving groups wanting to attend. For more information email gille@worldnet.att.net

Grotto Focus - Continued from front page.

the Infantry reserves and was stationed in Germany, France and South Korea, he retired in 1968 after 25 years of service. He caved in Germany and France but forbidden to in Korea because at that time he was over a hospital and there was no one to replace him. Even though he flew all over in a Hiller helicopter, they were afraid he would get killed in a cave! When he was returned to the states Carl was stationed here in San Antonio and with some other buddies from Ft Sam went caving all over Camp Bullis.

His most amazing cave experience was the chance to view the cave paintings in Lascaux in the Dordogne, France before it was closed to the public. To this day he deeply regrets not having a camera with him at the time.

Carl is a humble man, but proud of his family and proud of the kids who's lives he has touched. He has a Masters of Science, is fully certified in the Old Testament, Clinical Counseling, Education, and Educational Research. He has lead Explorers and Adventure Scouting consecutively for normal and handicapped children, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and even Brownies! They travelled all over the southwest and Mexico using a bus that was purchased with donated money and caving was a highlight of every trip, until lawyers interfered because of liability issues.

He has been a teacher, a Vice Principle and a Youth Activities Director. He has been introducing children to caving for decades and estimates that over 200 of those kids are cavers today.

As member of the St Mary's Grotto, that evolved into the San Antonio Grotto and then into the Bexar Grotto, Carl served as Chairman 3 times. He was a founding member of the TCMA and served as Director of the Board for 15 years.

To keep his mind sharp, today Carl works two crossword puzzles a day *in pen*, reads three books a week, and memorizes unnecessary facts. He loves getting letters and cards constantly from around the country from the kids who's lives he has touched. He lives and has lived by the credo: Appreciate and accept everybody.

UPCOMING TRIPS

Date	Event	Contact	Additional Information
10 Apr	Deep/Punkin	Geary Shindel	
9-10 May	Honey Creek	Kurt Menking	Work at the spring
6- 7 Jun	Honey Creek	Kurt Menking	Contact Bill Steele if you want to help haul tanks

UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Event	Additional Information
28 Mar	NCRC Cave Rescue Seminar.	Jasper, Arkansas, Jim Cantrell – 830 591-8106, Lisa Cantrell - 830 486-6128 cantrell@swtexas.net
4 - 5 Apr	Wilderness First Aid (WFA) Course	More information on this course can be found at http://www.wildmedcenter.com/home.html
11 Apr	Bracken Grotto Night	Contact Bob Cowell for information
13 - 18 Apr	Western Bat Working Group	2009 Western Bat Working Group Conference and Wind Energy Workshop in Austin, Texas. Website http://www.wbwg.org/index.html This workshop focuses on the latest information in field/study designs, acoustics, techniques, and protocols (both pre- and post-construction). It targets land managers, government regulators, industry professionals and consultants predicting risk for bats or conducting surveys for bats.
25 Apr	2009 TSA Spring Convention	Rob Bisset has made reservations for 16 campsites and the Recreation Hall for Friday and Saturday nights. Diana Tomchick & Bill Steel are Program Coordinators. Further information will be posted as it becomes available.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

3 May	Bamberger Ranch Day	15 Volunteers are needed for cooking. Contact Bob Cowell
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