

WILDLIFE SPECTACULAR

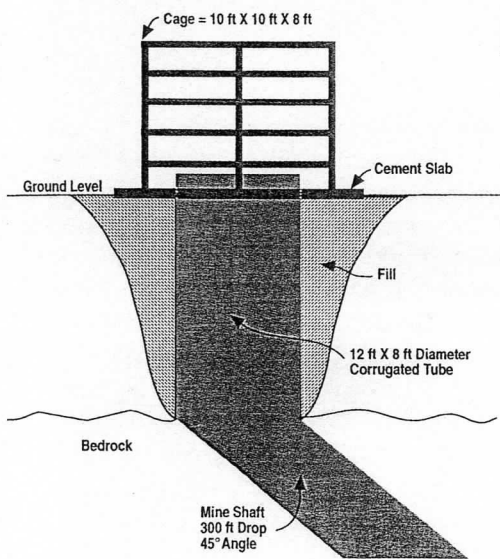
The Bats of Millie Hill

This is the first in a series of articles on unique gatherings of fish and wildlife in Michigan. The articles will appear occasionally over the next 12 months in The Wildlife Volunteer.

It is unlikely to be featured in a “Pure Michigan” ad, but one of our state’s most unique wildlife gatherings occurs each year in an abandoned mine at Iron Mountain in the western Upper Peninsula. The Millie Hill Mine is a hibernaculum for nearly 50,000 bats and some of them use it year-round. Its 38-48 degree winter temperatures are ideal for hibernating bats, and the mine has been recognized as one of the Midwest’s most important habitats for the often-unappreciated flying mammals.

Bats migrate from hundreds of miles away to the old iron ore mine, which was dug in the 1860s and abandoned around 1900. The bats become most numerous in late summer and fall when they gorge on insects to build fat for a hibernation that may last more than six months. Each bat may eat hundreds of mosquitoes and other flying insects per hour when foraging outside the mine.

Bat Colony Protection Structure at Millie Hill Mine Shaft



Since 1993, bats have entered and exited the Millie Hill Mine through a steel cage covering the sides of an eight foot-wide pipe. The structure was designed to help prevent raccoons and other predators from preying on the bats and was built using a combination of state and local funds. More recently, a path was installed, again with a mix of state and local money, to provide easier access for bat watch-

ers. Iron Mountain has twice hosted the annual Great Lakes Bat Festival, attracting thousands of visitors, which moves around the region boosting awareness of the ecological and economic (through insect control) values of bats.

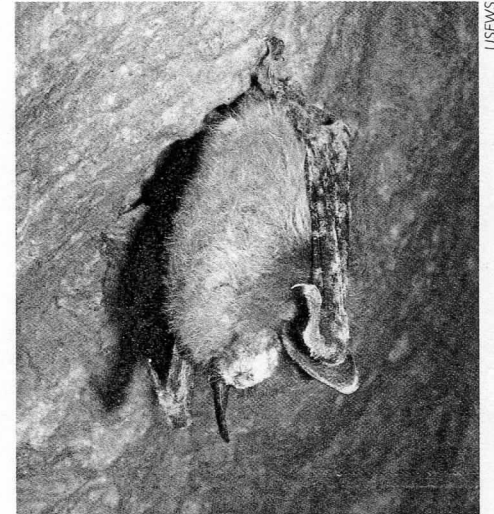
Visitors to the Millie Hill Mine have to wait until dusk to glimpse the mouse-sized animals. The bats sometimes squeak and chirp as they rise into the culvert. It’s not colorful, and darkness limits one’s ability to keep track of individual bats. But there is something special about watching at the mouth of a bat cave on a warm, humid night. An evening at New Mexico’s Carlsbad Caverns where hundreds of thousands of bats rise like a tornado before flying in an eerie line toward the Rio Grande River is unforgettable. The bats may be fewer and the views less picturesque at Millie Hill, but the educational experience is well worth the trip.

“Millie Hill is a great place to see bats in the fall,” says Rob Mies, director of the Organization for Bat Conservation. “You may only see several dozen in the summer, but thousands will come out of the pipe in fall.” But Mies added a sobering comment. “People may want to visit Millie Hill sooner than later, because whitenose fungus may kill all the bats in a few years.” The catastrophic disease is cold



Bill Scullon, DNR

Caves suitable for hibernating bats are rare in Michigan, and the whitenose fungus disease (shown below) now threatens the wintering colonist.



USFWS

tolerant and attacks cave-dwelling bats. If researchers are correct, it will likely make the mine a bat ghost town within the next five to ten years. This disease will be discussed in detail in the November/December issue of *The Wildlife Volunteer*.

Dr. Patrick J. Ruz
Director of Wildlife Programs

MICHIGAN BATS

Common Name	Latin Name	Appearance	Found	Status
Hoary	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	Large, dark hair with frosted tips	In foliage of trees	Rarely seen
Red	<i>Lasiurus borealis</i>	Bright orange to yellow brown	In trees, resembles dead leaf	Common
Silver-haired	<i>Lasionycteris noctivagans</i>	Medium size, dark, silver tipped fur	Behind loose tree bark	Rarely seen
Big brown	<i>Eptesicus</i>	Big, dark brown	Attics, barns, bat houses	Common
Little brown	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Small, light to dark brown	Buildings, bat houses, under siding	Common
Indiana	<i>Myotis sodalis</i>	Light brown	In trees with loose bark or cavities	Endangered
Northern long-eared	<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>	Long ears, light brown	In wetlands, dying trees	Not common
Evening	<i>Nycticeius humeralis</i>	Small, delicate, dark brown	Only in southern Michigan	Rare