

South Dakota Bat Working Group – Position Statement – *Corynorhinus* Captivity Programs

A recent bat management concern called White Nose Syndrome has generated a number of conservation scenarios. The following link will take you to Bat Conservation International's web site and provide information and background on this serious problem currently affecting six species of bats in the eastern U.S.

([://www.batcon.org/pdfs/whitenose/WNSFACTSHEET_Feb16_2010.pdf](http://www.batcon.org/pdfs/whitenose/WNSFACTSHEET_Feb16_2010.pdf))

Among these suggested conservation scenarios is one involving the capture of wild western big-eared bats (*Corynorhinus townsendii townsendii* / *C. t. pallescens*) to be used as experimental surrogates for the federal endangered Ozark big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii ingens*) and Virginia big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*). The South Dakota Bat Working Group is opposed to this alternative for the following reasons:

There has been no documented mortality for *Corynorhinus townsendii* resulting from White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in the area of the U.S. affected by this phenomenon. Therefore, experimental results with this species may have limited value in addressing the threat to other big-eared bat species/subspecies, and this species' relevance as an experimental subject for this fungus is unproven.

The Townsend's big-eared bat is a sedentary species with no regionally documented movement. As such, bats removed from a given population represent a loss that will not be replenished by migration from other populations.

The western distribution of the genus is comprised of isolated pockets of distribution and considered to be "sensitive" across its range by federal and state agencies. While Townsend's big-eared bat is more geographically widespread than the Ozark or Virginia big-eared bat, it is highly susceptible to loss at the population level as a result of this isolation. Considered an obligate underground roosting species, habitat requirements likely serve to limit the distribution of this bat.

Corynorhinus townsendii is a species considered to be particularly susceptible to disturbance in roost selection and use. Disturbance within roosts is known to cause roost abandonment. This has implications for the balance of a population from which a group is taken into captivity (i.e., those bats not taken into captivity may abandon an otherwise significant or critical roost location).

There is no population of this genus where we would know the extent of the impact on the overall population from which it was taken. We do not know the minimum viable population size for this species in the wild or in a captive environment.

This species has not been successfully maintained in captivity. A recent failed project involving the captivity of the federal listed Virginia big-eared bat has resulted in high mortality.

There is no evidence western members of this genus are representative of central and/or eastern populations in required habitat or behaviors associated with specific regional ecology.

Suggested removal of this species into a captive population is in no way contributing to the determination of a cause for WNS. Until we determine WNS's etiology, how are we able to determine that animals being removed from the wild are not those with natural immunity to the agent of mortality whose continued presence in the wild would serve to protect the larger population?

At this time, we feel such captive programs are unjustified and unwarranted serving only to siphon limited resources away from research likely to determine a cause for this devastating condition. It also only serves to further imperil bats that are already in danger as demonstrated by the recognition of the fragility of their numbers and their dependence upon limiting habitat requirements.