

## Lifestyles

### Batty discussions on tap at researchers' conference

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Bats are far from the most beloved creatures on earth. In fact, they're downright unsettling to many, thanks in no small part to their association with Dracula and Halloween.

In reality, though, these winged mammals are a crucial part of our ecosystem.

Bats will be on the mind of the roughly 400 scientists, legislators, and public health policy makers from around the world who will descend upon downtown Scranton this week for the 38th annual North American Symposium on Bat Research (NASBR), which is dedicated to the promotion and development of the scientific study of bats.

Running Wednesday through Saturday, the symposium's events will be divided between Hilton Scranton and Conference Center and University of Scranton. Organizing the event, which will be open to the public, is U of S biology professor Gary Kwiecinski, Ph.D., a bat expert who has been attending the symposium for 29 years.

"It's bat researchers getting together and sharing what they're doing and what they've learned. It's science. It's science related to bats," Mr. Kwiecinski said. "I consider it a personal honor. I volunteered because I've been going for so long. I like to give back because they've given me so much over the years."

The fact that the symposium is taking place a week before Halloween is just coincidence, Mr. Kwiecinski said. It almost always occurs in the third week of October.

Over the course of the three-day event, bat experts from roughly 30 countries, including the United States, Great Britain, Germany and Indonesia, will explore a host of scientific and public policy issues related to bat conservation, including bat echo location and sensory research and white-nose syndrome, a mysterious phenomenon killing hundreds of thousands of hibernating bats throughout New York and New England.

The symposium will include a special session on bat management in Pennsylvania by the state Game Commission, which is monitoring Luzerne, Fayette and Blair counties for bat populations that may be at risk of white-nose syndrome. Among those suffering from the disease is the Indiana bat, an endangered species that can be found in Pennsylvania.

"It's kind of like the bee thing. It's colony collapse in bats," Mr. Kwiecinski said of white-nose syndrome.

Also slated for discussion is the devastating effect wind farms, specifically those set on ridges, are having on migratory bats.

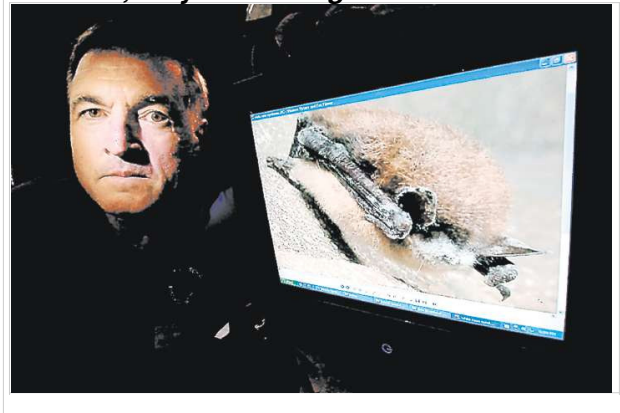
"Something about them, the bats follow the ridges while migrating in spring and fall, resulting in a disproportionately large number of kills," Mr. Kwiecinski said. "We need to come up with reason why and come up with some sort of deterrent."

Bats play a huge role in the environment, so their preservation is imperative. Among other things, bats are key in controlling the insect population, particularly mosquitoes and black flies. In the northeastern United States, all bats are insect-eaters, and a single bat on average devours upward of 3,000 flying insects a night.

In addition, many plants are heavily dependent on bat pollination, including agave cactus, which produces tequila, durian fruit and wild bananas, according to Mr. Kwiecinski.

"When forests are clear cut, the first plants re-established are bat-dependent plants," said Mr. Kwiecinski, noting noting bats fly overhead and seed the plants with their droppings.

Bats can be traced to numerous medical and scientific breakthroughs. For instance, one of the most potent clot busters in use was developed by studying anti-coagulant in vampire bats, while bat guano figures in everything from detergents to substances used to clean up oil spills, Mr. Kwiecinski said.



The symposium's other highlights include a competition between promising undergraduate and graduate student bat researchers from around the country ("They're the ones at the cutting edge," Mr. Kwiecinski said), and a Saturday morning workshop for area school teachers looking to learn more about bats.

"I think it's going to be a great conference," Mr. Kwiecinski said.

Contact the writer: [jmcauliffe@timeshamrock.com](mailto:jmcauliffe@timeshamrock.com) If you go

What: 38th annual North American Symposium on Bat Research

When: Wednesday through Saturday

Where: University of Scranton and Hilton Scranton and Conference Center

Details: The symposium's events are open to the public. For a complete schedule of events, visit its Web site at [www.nasbr.org/](http://www.nasbr.org/)

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