

THE FORGOTTEN BAT CAVES: RECOGNIZING AND MANAGING BAT CAVES EVEN WHEN THERE ARE NO BATS

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Abstract

The popular wisdom is that the most important bat caves have been identified and protected. However, those caves are only the ones where researchers have recently found bats. We are now learning that bats may have been displaced to those sites due to disturbance in their historically-preferred caves. Instead of thriving in a cave with optimal conditions, many colonies are now barely hanging on or declining in less-suitable sites. The preferred caves are usually abandoned due to uncontrolled visitation (“there are no bats using the cave, so there is no reason to stay out”), or have been modified through commercialization efforts, including saltpeter mining. If we identify these overlooked sites and determine why they are no longer being used we can hopefully restore them as prime hibernacula. This allows more available habitat for bats, especially the endangered Indiana bat, where over 50% of the known population hibernates in only eight sites.
