



## Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

## Northern Myotis *Myotis septentrionalis*

State Status: **Endangered**  
Federal Status: **Threatened**

**DESCRIPTION:** The Northern Myotis is a small bat with large ears, which when pushed forward extend at least 4 mm past its nose. Its fur and wing membranes are light brown, giving it an overall somewhat uniform brown appearance. The hairs on its back are bicolored, with a dark base and lighter tip. The Northern Myotis averages 50-95 mm in total length, with a tail of 35-42 mm. In weight, it averages 5-8 g. This bat is typically found roosting in trees and feeding in forested habitats, but may occasionally be found in human habitations.

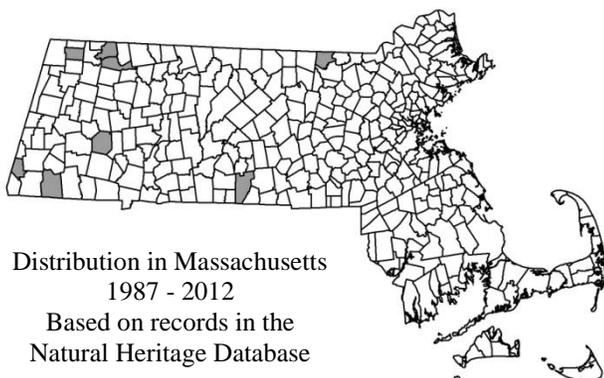
**SIMILAR SPECIES:** The best diagnostic character to distinguish the Northern Myotis from other species in Massachusetts is its long ears. The rare Little Brown Myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*, Endangered) and Indiana Myotis (*Myotis sodalis*, Endangered, federally Endangered) are similar in appearance, but have shorter ears which typically do not extend beyond their nose when pushed forward. The tragus, which is a fleshy projection which sticks up in front of the ear opening, is long and narrowly pointed in the Northern Myotis, while it is shorter and blunt in the Little Brown Myotis. The Little Brown Myotis also has glossier fur and a shorter tail relative to its body length. The Indiana Myotis has a



Photo: Tammy Ciesla, MassWildlife

keeled calcar (a ridge of cartilage between the foot and the tail), which the Northern Myotis lacks. Other features of interest in identification include the bat's hairless interfemoral membrane (the skin stretching between the legs and tail) and lack of a black face mask (which is characteristic of Small-footed Myotis, *Myotis leibii*, Endangered).

**HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS:** In the warmer months, colonies of Northern Myotis may be found roosting and foraging in forested areas. Preferred roosts are in clustered stands of large trees, especially in live or dead hardwoods with large, tall cavities. These bats are found in other tree roosts as well, and occasionally in human-made structures. Northern Myotis forage under the forest canopy in structurally complex habitats, often above small ponds, vernal pools or streams, along gravel paths or roads, and at the forest edge. The bats are widespread in Massachusetts, and have been found in 11



*A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan*

## Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

1 Rabbit Hill Rd., Westborough, MA; tel: 508-389-6300; fax: 508-389-7890; [www.mass.gov/dfw](http://www.mass.gov/dfw)

Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

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of 14 counties. In winter, Northern Myotis hibernate in natural caves and abandoned mines, preferring habitats where the humidity is so high that water droplets sometimes cover their fur. Winter hibernacula (hibernation sites) have been reported in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, Middlesex, and Worcester counties.

**RANGE:** The Northern Myotis is found across forested parts of the eastern United States and Canada, west to British Columbia, Wyoming, and Montana, and south into Florida. It was historically common in New England, the Canadian Maritimes, Quebec and Ontario, and uncommon in the western extremes of its range.

**LIFE CYCLE/BEHAVIOR:** In the summer months, Northern Myotis emerge at dusk from daytime roosts for the first in a series of feeding flights. Their long tails and large wing membranes allow the bats to fly slowly and navigate through cluttered environments. These special adaptations also enable them to glean prey from foliage, in addition to catching insects on the fly. These bats locate resting insects through a combination of passive listening and the emission of high frequency echolocation calls.

Between August and October, the body weight of Northern Myotis increases by up to 45%, as they store fat for winter. In late summer, the bats begin to “swarm” around the entrances of caves, and are thought to be testing the air of possible hibernacula. This is the time when mating occurs, with females storing the sperm within their bodies until spring. By early November, the bats enter hibernation sites. Their metabolisms slow and they enter torpor, but will rouse occasionally throughout the winter to drink water. Northern Myotis share caves with a number of other species, but tend to hibernate singly or in small groups in deep cracks or crevices. They return to the same hibernacula in multiple years, but may not hibernate in the same location every year. Little data are available on migration, but the bats are known to travel up to 56 km from foraging sites to winter hibernacula.

Females bear and rear single young from mid-May through July. The longevity record for the Northern Myotis is 18 years.

**POPULATION STATUS IN MASSACHUSETTS, INCLUDING THREATS:** The Northern Myotis is listed as Endangered under the Massachusetts

Endangered Species Act. All listed species are protected from killing, collecting, possessing, or sale and from activities that would destroy habitat and thus directly or indirectly cause mortality or disrupt critical behaviors. In addition, listed animals are specifically protected from activities that disrupt nesting, breeding, feeding, or migration.

Once a common species in the northern United States, populations of the Northern Myotis have been devastated by the spread of White-nose Syndrome. Populations in infected hibernacula in the Northeast have suffered catastrophic losses of 90-100%. White-nose Syndrome is caused by a newly described fungus, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, which is believed to be a non-native species accidentally introduced from caves in western Europe. European species of bats have co-evolved with this fungus, so they have a high degree of immunity. The fungus grows over bats while they hibernate, causing them to rouse from dormancy frequently, lose valuable stored fat, and fail to survive the winter. The fungus is believed to be passed from cave to cave primarily by the movements of breeding male bats, but human transport is also thought to be responsible for the infection of some hibernacula.

**MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:** The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is working in concert with government and non-profit groups to understand the spread of the fungus and potential for stopping its spread, as well as exploring opportunities for captive breeding of the most vulnerable species. Access to suitable undisturbed hibernacula is essential to the survival of the Northern Myotis, and protection of known sites is paramount. Human disturbance of hibernacula can be discouraged or prevented with the use of gated entrances, in order to avoid arousal of hibernating bats and the spread of fungal spores.

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