

GREEN ISLANDS

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Summit Metro Parks Bi-Monthly Magazine

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Batty for Bats

Our parks are like green islands in an urban landscape.

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The park district's governing body is appointed by the Summit County Probate Judge. Commissioners serve overlapping three-year terms and are assisted by the executive director, who oversees the work of full-time and part-time employees, seasonal workers and volunteers.

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THE FALL HIKING SPREE SHIELD ASSISTANCE

Is attaching the hiking spree shield more challenging than hiking the eight trails? Summit Metro Parks volunteers will gladly attach it for you at no charge on the dates below.

hiking Spree Shield Assistance | 1 to 3 p.m.

Sunday, October 18

Liberty Park Nature Center

9999 Liberty Rd, Twinsburg 44087

Sunday, November 1

Summit Lake Nature Center

411 Ira Ave., Akron 44301

Saturday, November 7, 14, 21 & 28

F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm Visitors Center

1828 Smith Rd., Akron 44313

Sunday, December 6

Goodyear Heights Metro Park / Lodge

2077 Newton St., Akron 44305

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DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

ENJOY THE LIVING LANDSCAPE THIS FALL

How have the Metro Parks evolved from past to present? Take a hike this fall and become immersed in the “living landscape” around you. This year, the 63rd annual Fall Hiking Spree theme explores what’s changed, what remains the same and the flora and fauna that thrive in fall. At the start of each spree trail, visitors will find an interpretive sign with stories about the park’s or trail’s past and present and what makes the area special for plants and animals today. From reforestations helped along by Girl Scouts or golf

courses turned goldenrod and goldfinch-flocked fields, what will you discover as you walk?

Find more information about Fall Hiking Spree trails, download your form or learn more about this year’s theme at hikingspree.summitmetroparks.org.

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RETURNING TO FLIGHT

The slow and progressive recovery of Ohio bats after white-nose syndrome

Mike Johnson, Chief of Conservation

People are sometimes surprised I know more about how bats are doing than eagles. It’s because eagles are well into the safe zone now — they do not currently need our help. Sometimes, working as a wildlife biologist feels like being a doctor triaging patients in a time of crisis; those in the most critical condition receive the most attention, while those recovering quietly fade from focus as the next crisis emerges. That was certainly the case when white-nose syndrome (WNS) arrived in North America and triggered one of the most devastating wildlife collapses on the continent.

WNS is a fungal disease native to Europe and Asia, where bats have evolved alongside it and developed resistance. North American bats, however, had no such defenses. When the fungus was accidentally introduced in upstate New York, it spread rapidly. Infecting bats during hibernation, when their body temperatures are low, it causes them to wake frequently, burn through fat reserves and ultimately die. Millions were lost.

By around 2007, WNS reached Summit County. The effects were immediate and alarming. Reports came in of bats flying into the snow in midwinter, only to die shortly after. Summer monitoring revealed steep population declines. Once-common species, like little

brown bats, northern long-eared bats and tricolored bats, vanished from sites where thousands had once been counted. In some cases, populations dropped to undetectable levels. There were nights when we recorded no bats at all.

We had warning. We knew WNS was coming and understood what it could do. Still, nothing prepared us for the scale of the loss. Years of conservation work seemed to unravel almost overnight.

And yet, nature can be resilient — especially when people work together to protect what remains and identify a clear path for recovery.

In response to WNS, biologists mobilized. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implemented new protections, and as populations declined, several species were listed as threatened or endangered. The northern long-eared bat, once as common as a cardinal, was listed as threatened, then moved to endangered status. While such listings reflect serious concern, they also provide critical protections. Development and land-use projects now follow strict guidelines to avoid harming sensitive habitats, including restrictions on tree cutting during key reproductive periods.

At the state level, Ohio followed suit, listing multiple bat species as state endangered. Together, federal and state agencies have worked to ensure that development, transportation and energy projects do not further impact these already vulnerable species. They have also led broader education and conservation efforts across the region.

At Summit Metro Parks, our work has focused on protecting habitat and supporting what remains of these fragile populations. This has included acquiring land in key areas, monitoring known maternity colonies, implementing tree-cutting restrictions aligned with state and federal guidance, and installing gates and monitoring equipment at hibernation sites to reduce disturbance. Our naturalists offer programs that highlight

bats in our park district and the important role they play in conservation.

For years, we monitored and waited, hoping for signs that these efforts might make a difference.

In 2025, we began to see the first glimmer of hope. Surveys near winter hibernation sites showed slight increases in bat activity. Notably, numbers of the state-endangered little brown bat began to rise. We also reconfirmed the presence of the federally endangered Indiana bat — one of the region's most imperiled species. One specimen we captured was in excellent condition, having built up significant fat reserves for hibernation.

These are small but meaningful signs of recovery.

Still, the situation remains fragile. Bats reproduce slowly (typically only one pup per year), so recovery will take decades. Continued vigilance is essential. Protecting habitat, minimizing disturbance and maintaining conservation efforts will determine whether these species truly return.

With hope and help, silent wings are again taking to flight.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ...

Q Do bats carry rabies?

A Bats can carry rabies, but it's rare. Avoid handling bats, especially if they appear sick or injured. If contact occurs, seek medical advice.

Q How can I get a bat out of my house?

A For a single bat, close off the room, turn off lights and open a window — it will usually leave on its own.

If multiple bats are present (likely a maternity colony), contact a wildlife professional. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources can help connect you with specialists.

Q Can a bat with white-nose syndrome be cured?

A Bats with white-nose syndrome can sometimes recover in rehabilitation. Treating wild populations, however, remains difficult, so conservation focuses on protection and natural recovery.

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BATTY FOR BATS

Bats are some of nature's most misunderstood creatures!

Read on to dispel rumors and discover the truth about these winged wonders!

MYTH:

Bats are big and scary.

FACT:

Only night insects have anything to fear from bats. Most Ohio bats are light enough to be mailed as a First-Class letter. Hoary bats, which are Ohio's largest bats, only grow to a wingspan of 13 inches.

Because of their buggy diet, all Ohio bats are considered microbats.

MYTH:

All bats live in caves.

FACT:

Some bats do live in caves, but over half of all species rest in plants.

Eastern red bats are a type of tree bat and can be mistaken for leaves.

MYTH:

Bats drink blood.

FACT:

All Ohio bats are insectivores, meaning they only eat insects. This includes many moths, beetles and mosquitos (nature's real bloodsuckers).

One bat can eat over 1,000 insects in a single night!

MYTH:

Bats are blind.

FACT:

Bats have eyesight similar to humans. Bats also use echolocation to "see," meaning they use high-pitched sounds to locate objects based on how that noise is reflected back.

Most bats are nocturnal, or active at night. Echolocation helps them find food in the dark!

MYTH:

All bats hibernate in caves.

FACT:

Bats hibernate in many ways — from inside caves, rock crevices, tree cavities and leaf litter to under rocks and logs.

Some bats, like the silver-haired and little brown bats, even migrate south to find warmer spots for winter.

MYTH:

Bats are dirty.

FACT:

Bats groom themselves often, similar to a cat, to maintain their fur and protect themselves from parasites.

They might clean themselves like a cat, but bat babies are called pups!

MYTH:

Bats are rodents.

FACT:

Bats are in their own order: Chiroptera. With over 1,400 species worldwide, bats make up 25% of all mammal species.

Bats are the only mammal capable of sustained flight.

[Bat wings are modified hands. Wingspans of most Ohio bats are under 12 inches. How does your hand span compare to a bat's wingspan?]