

Native Prairie Speaker Series

Presentation: Understanding and managing white-nose syndrome in North American bats.

Presentation Summary: Bats are the only mammals that can fly under their own power and that ability has led to their remarkable diversity with over 1,200 species worldwide. In the temperate world, bats provide important ecosystem services potentially contributing billions of dollars in pest control to North American agriculture. In the tropics, in addition to eating pests of crops and forests, bats disperse seeds and are the primary pollinators of many wild, and some agricultural, tropical plants. Sadly, however, North American bats are also in big trouble. A devastating fungal disease called white-nose syndrome (WNS) has led to a staggering collapse of multiple North American bat species in what is thought to be the fastest decline of wild mammals in history. The fungus that causes WNS was introduced, likely by people, to hibernation sites of bats in New York State just over 10 years ago. Since then the disease has spread across the eastern half of the continent killing millions of bats. Dr. Willis will discuss research from his laboratory, and from across North America, to understand WNS and help manage bat populations in the face of this conservation crisis.



Speaker: Dr. Craig K. R. Willis, Professor, Department of Biology, University of Winnipeg

Biography: Dr. Craig Willis joined the University of Winnipeg in 2006, was the University's first Chancellor's Research Chair from 2011 to 2014 and is currently a Professor of Biology. He and his students work on the ecology, physiology and conservation of small, wild mammals, especially bats, and have been contributing to WNS research since the disease was discovered in 2007. Their work has been important for understanding the origin and physiological effects of WNS and for understanding how we might protect bat populations from the impacts of the disease. Dr. Willis has authored or co-authored more than 100 peer-reviewed publications, and his group's research on WNS has been covered in the national and international media including on CBC's "The National", "The Current" and "Quirks and Quarks" and by BBC News, The Guardian and The Wall Street Journal.

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