



Above is pictured a little brown myotis bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), the likeliest bat to be seen around Inuvik. This species of bat is assessed as endangered under the Federal Species at Risk Act.

A Kelly ENR GNWT photo



Stewart Burnett/NNSL photo

Kaytlin Cooper, species at risk biologist with the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, shows off her bat detector, which picks up the sounds bats make. She's received several unconfirmed bat sightings in the Beaufort Delta in the last few months and wants to find out if there's truth to the rumours.

Endangered bats may live in area

Possible sightings lead researcher to investigate

by Stewart Burnett
Northern News Services

If you've seen any bats around Inuvik or the larger Gwich'in Settlement Area, species at risk biologist Kaytlin Cooper wants to hear from you.

There haven't been any authenticated sightings, but Cooper has heard of one bat-sighting in Aklavik, and then a few weeks ago at a board meeting in Tsiigetichic there was mention of seeing a few bats. Cooper has also heard of bats in a Fort McPherson cabin.

As far as the Gwich'in

Renewable Resources Board knows, this is a new phenomenon.

"It's really interesting," said Cooper. "We don't know for sure if they actually are here."

She's hoping to have community members report any sightings with as much information as possible about where the bats were seen, when and what they were doing.

There are five different species of bat being assessed under the Northwest Territories Species at Risk Act. The most likely one to be this far north is the little brown myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*), which is assessed as endangered under the Federal Species at Risk Act.

Most bat surveys in the NWT have been done in the southern part of the territory, Cooper said.

"It could be that they've been here for a long time and we weren't aware of it, or they could have flown up here recently and don't plan on sticking around," said Cooper. "We really don't know right now."

Bats can migrate up to about 550 km between summer and winter habitats, but they generally don't fly long distances, especially the females. They also tend to go back to the same areas each summer and winter, during the latter of which they hibernate.

The little brown myotis is the likeliest candidate to be in the Beaufort Delta because of its varied eating habits, which could expand its range.

Cooper can't know for sure yet why bats would be in the area, but one idea is that climate change has allowed their habitat to expand northward.

fact FILE

'BAT' IN GWICH'IN

- Daatsadh natandit'ee (Gwichya Gwich'in dialect)
- Daatsoo natindit'ee (Teet'it Gwich'in Dialect)
- Both Gwich'in translations for bat mean "flying mouse"

Another could be that bats are travelling north to escape White-nose Syndrome, a fungus that causes them to wake up in the winter from their hibernation and often kills them. It is a primary reason bat populations are severely declining throughout North America, said Cooper.

"The fungus can't live in colder temperatures, so it's a possibility that could help the recovery," she said. "It's all speculation right now."

The more reporting she can get and pass on to the renewable resource board, the more likelihood the government can get some surveys done in the area.

Whether she does it through work or not, Cooper will be out there with her bat detector investigating the case for bats in the Inuvik area.

"Even if we can't do any surveys through work, I plan on going out just on my own time, having a little listen and seeing if I can find anything," she said.

People who think they have seen bats are encouraged to contact Cooper at kcooper@grrb.nt.ca with as much information as possible, including location, time, date, description of the bat, what it was doing and anything else relevant.

Be Heard!

The GNWT is developing an NWT Energy Strategy and a Climate Change Strategic Framework as we look at renewable energy, energy conservation and efficiency, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Tell us what you think!

Where: Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre

When: Tuesday, November 1, 2016
7:00 pm – 9:00 pm

enr.gov.nt.ca

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Northwest Territories