BATS:

JOAN CARTAN-HANSEN, REPORTER: THE UNDERGROUND CHAMBER OF THE OLD SWAN FALLS POWER PLANT IS HOME TO A COLONY OF LITTLE BROWN BATS. THERE ARE ONLY A HANDFUL OF KNOWN BAT COLONIES OF THIS SIZE IN IDAHO. STATE WILDLIFE VETERINARIAN, MARK DREW, AND WILDLIFE COORDINATOR, RITA DIXON, ARE HERE ON A MISSION. THEY'RE HERE TO TRY TO SAVE THE BATS.

RITA DIXON, IDAHO DEPT. OF FISH AND GAME: THERE IS A DISEASE CALLED "WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME," AND IT SHOWED UP IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES AND HAS SINCE SPREAD TO HALF THE COUNTRY.

MARK DREW, WILDLIFE VETERINARIAN: WHITE-NOSE IS ONE OF THOSE THINGS THAT KIND OF CAME ON THE SCENE A DECADE OR MORE AGO. NEVER SEEN THE FUNGUS BEFORE. ALL OF A SUDDEN, IT'S HERE, AND IT'S KILLING MILLIONS OF BATS. IN FACT, SOME BAT SPECIES ARE ALMOST ENDANGERED OR ALMOST EXTINCT BECAUSE OF THE FUNGUS.

CARTAN-HANSEN: IT'S CALLED "WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME" BECAUSE THE DISEASE LEAVES A WHITE FUNGUS ON THE INFECTED BAT'S NOSE AND WINGS.

DIXON: AND YOU'VE GOT THE CLIPBOARD, RIGHT?

CARTAN-HANSEN: THE FUNGUS USUALLY INFECTS THE BATS AS THEY HIBERNATE IN THE WINTER.

DREW: THE FUNGUS DISRUPTS THE HIBERNATION BECAUSE IT MAKES THEM SICK. IT'S A VERY TIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN "I'VE GOT ENOUGH FAT TO GET THROUGH THE WINTER" OR "I DON'T."

AND ANYTHING THAT DISRUPTS THAT BALANCE IS GOING TO POTENTIALLY CAUSE MORTALITY.

CARTAN-HANSEN: DREW AND DIXON START THEIR INVESTIGATION BY RECORDING THE CHAMBER'S TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY.

DIXON: TEMPERATURE AND HUMIDITY IS REALLY AN IMPORTANT INDICATOR OF

THE CONDITIONS FOR THE BATS, AS WELL AS WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME. OKAY. THIS DRY READING IS 65, AND THE WET READING IS 57.

CARTAN-HANSEN: NEXT, THE SCIENTISTS COLLECT SAMPLES FROM THE BATS.

DIXON: SWABBING BATS IS BASICALLY TAKING A STERILE SWAB, DIPPING IT IN A SOLUTION, AND THEN ROLLING THE SWAB BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE BAT'S FOREARM THREE TIMES AND THEN ACROSS THE BAT'S

MUZZLE.

“SORRY, HONEY.”

AND WHAT THAT DOES IS, IF THERE WERE ANY FUNGUS FROM WHITE-NOSE, WE WOULD PROBABLY PICK IT UP ON THE SWAB.

“SORRY, LITTLE BUDDIES.”

AND THEN IT GETS BROKEN OFF, PUT BACK IN THE LITTLE TUBE, AND THEN WE WILL BE SHIPPING THAT TO THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE HEALTH CENTER SO THAT THEY CAN EXAMINE IT AND SEE IF THEY FIND ANY FUNGUS.

“I'M GOING TO GET THIS ONE RIGHT UP HERE.”

DREW: THE CRITICAL THING FOR US IN IDAHO, BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE THE FUNGUS, IS WE NEED TO KNOW IF AND WHEN IT ARRIVES.

DIXON: “OKAY. SANDY, YOU SAID THERE WAS ONE OVER HERE BY THE LIGHT.”

DREW: WE WANT TO BE ABLE TO FIND THIS FUNGUS REALLY, REALLY EARLY SO THAT WE CAN RESPOND TO IT IN A COLONY LIKE THIS WHERE WE CAN DO SOMETHING.

DIXON: “OKAY. SO, THAT'S FIVE IN THIS CHAMBER. OKAY”

CARTAN-HANSEN: THE TEAM COLLECTS SAMPLES FROM 25 BATS. EVERYTHING NEEDS TO BE DONE QUICKLY AND QUIETLY.

DREW: MOST OF THEM TOLERATED WHAT WE DID. SOME OF THEM GOT A LITTLE IRRITATED AND FLEW AROUND. THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED.

CARTAN-HANSEN: DREW SAYS HUMANS ARE THE BIGGEST CAUSE FOR THE SPREAD OF WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME.

DREW: PEOPLE MOVE, AND CAVERS AND PEOPLE THAT LIKE TO GO INTO CAVES, THEY CAN TRANSPORT THE FUNGUS IN THE DEBRIS AND THE MUD AND THINGS LIKE THAT THAT THEY HAVE ON THEIR SHOES AND ON THEIR CLOTHES.

CARTAN-HANSEN: FOR THE BATS' PROTECTION, THESE CHAMBERS AREN'T OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, AND THE SCIENTISTS WEAR PROTECTIVE CLOTHING TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY DON'T SPREAD ANY DISEASE. BEFORE LEAVING, SCIENTISTS TAKE A LAST LOOK AROUND FOR ANY SICK OR DEAD BATS, ANOTHER SIGN OF POSSIBLE INFECTION. THEN THE SAMPLES ARE SENT OFF FOR TESTING. FORTUNATELY, THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE HEALTH CENTER FOUND NO TRACE OF THE FUNGUS THAT CAUSES WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME IN THIS COLONY, BUT THE SCIENTISTS WILL BE BACK TO MAKE SURE THESE BATS STAY HEALTHY.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT YOU SHOULDN'T DISTURB BATS IF YOU FIND THEM IN THE WILD. AND IF YOU'RE DOING SOME CAVING, BE SURE TO DECONTAMINATE YOUR CLOTHES SO YOU DON'T SPREAD THE FUNGUS. THANKS FOR JOINING US ON LOCATION WITH SCIENCETREK.

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