

## NEWS RELEASE

July 14, 2023

Contact: Michelle Beyrle, Public Health Information Officer  
(719) 244-1947

### **Bat found outside Starsmore Visitor and Nature Center tests positive for rabies**

*First rabid bat in El Paso County in 2023*

**El Paso County, Colorado** – A bat found at the Starsmore Visitor and Nature Center in North Cheyenne Canyon was confirmed to have rabies, making it the first animal to test positive for the disease in El Paso County this year.

On Monday, July 10, El Paso County Public Health (EPCPH) was notified of the bat, which was found crawling on the ground during the day. The bat was promptly sent for testing, then confirmed positive for rabies on Thursday, July 13.

There are currently no known exposures between the bat and any visitors or staff; however, anyone who may have touched the bat or believe that a child or pet had contact with the bat on July 10 should call EPCPH immediately at (719) 578-3220.

“With the summer months in full swing, we do typically start to see more cases of rabies among wildlife,” said Dr. Bernadette Albanese, co-medical director of El Paso County Public Health. “Now is a good time to make sure your pets are up to date on their rabies vaccinations. We know folks are spending more time outdoors, taking advantage of our region’s scenic parks and trails, and by taking a few simple steps such as keeping pets on a leash and making sure that pets and children don’t interact with wild animals, you can help prevent the risk of rabies.”

Rabies is a virus that generally infects wild mammals, such as bats, raccoons, skunks and foxes, but it can also infect your pets too. The disease is spread most often by a bite from a rabid animal. Rabies affects the brain, causing brain swelling and damage, and is fatal once symptoms appear.

### **How to recognize sick wildlife:**

- Healthy wild animals are normally afraid of humans.
- Sick animals may not run away when spotted by people.
- Wildlife suffering from rabies will often act aggressively and violently approach people or pets.

- However, sometimes rabid animals are overly quiet and passive and want to hide. If they are hiding, leave them alone. Rabid wildlife might also stumble or have trouble walking.
- Report sick or diseased wild animals to the Colorado Parks and Wildlife at (719) 227-5200.

#### **Take these precautions to prevent rabies:**

- **Vaccinate your pets** against rabies. Rabies shots need to be boosted, so check your pet's records or talk to your veterinarian.
- **When walking or hiking with your dog**, protect them and wildlife by keeping your dog on a leash.
- **Keep cats and other pets inside** at night to reduce the risk of exposure to wildlife. Keep dogs within your sight (in a fenced yard, or on leash) during the day while outside.
- **Contact your veterinarian** promptly if you believe your pet has been exposed to a wild animal.
- **Do not touch or feed any wild animals.** Wild animals like skunks and foxes adapt to residential environments if food is available – please don't leave pet food outdoors.
- **If you, a family member or a pet is bitten or scratched** by a wild animal, call your doctor and EPCPH at (719) 578-3220 or (719) 235-2278 after hours.
- **Seal houses** to prevent bats and other animals from nesting, and if already present, use a professional animal removal service. More information is available at [www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/management](http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/management).
- **To report an animal bite from a domestic or wild animal**, go to [www.elpasocountyhealth.org/service/infectious-diseases/report-an-animal-bite](http://www.elpasocountyhealth.org/service/infectious-diseases/report-an-animal-bite).
- **If you encounter a lost or stray dog or cat**, contact the Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region for options (719) 473-1741.

#### **Reports of rabies in El Paso County, Colorado**

- 2022: 4 (bats)
- 2021: 7 (3 bats, 3 skunks, 1 cat)
- 2020: 10 (5 bats, 4 skunks, 1 sheep)
- 2019: 16 (9 skunks, 5 bats, 1 fox, 1 dog)
- 2018: 69 (62 skunks, 6 bats, 1 raccoon)
- 2017: 28 (7 bats, 21 skunks)
- 2016: 3 (bats)
- 2015: 6 (5 bats, 1 cat)
- 2014: 10 (bats)
- 2013: 8 (4 bats, 2 foxes, 2 skunks)

###