



NEWS - ENVIRONMENT

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## Light pollution causes bird deaths

by John Young

With trees leafing out as we get into April, peak migratory season for birds has begun. From the beginning of April until the end of May, millions of birds come north from southerly regions to nest.

As they make the journey, many of these birds will die due to collisions with manmade objects. This is a large problem in downtown Indianapolis, where migrating birds become disoriented at night by brightly lit buildings. The lights of buildings and reflections from glass draw them downward and confuse them, often resulting in collision and death.

To prevent bird mortality and save energy in downtown buildings, managers are being encouraged to turn off their lights from the hours of midnight until dawn.

Spearheading the effort is a program called Lights Out Indy, an initiative started and funded by the Amos W. Butler Audubon Society. According to Dan Gorney, the Project Director of Lights Out Indy, the idea for the project was conceived in 2008 and put into action in 2009.

"The project has not been as easy as we thought," said Gorney. "Building managers hear that we're trying to save birds and they think of starlings, but starlings aren't usually harmed in building strikes, they are not migratory."

Reaching building managers has proved difficult but the pragmatic approach of saving birds and saving energy at the same time has drawn participation in the program from some notable downtown tenants. The Indianapolis Museum of Art, The Central Library and the NCAA Hall of Champions are all participants, among others.

Gorney said that calculating saved energy costs is rather difficult but he expects to have estimated figures soon. He feels the energy savings could be significant for buildings like the Indiana Statehouse, the exterior of which is illuminated all night long with sixty-five 1000 watt light bulbs.

Gorney cites the Statehouse, Veteran's Memorial Plaza and Monument Circle as areas where a heavy concentration of bird strikes happen.

In limited searches last year, Lights Out Indy found over 500 birds dead from collisions. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that about 100 million birds die every year due to building collisions.

Gorney said that many species Lights Out Indy has found have been "species of concern", meaning that conservation organizations have concern regarding status and threats. One such species was the yellow rail, a small waterbird that lives in marshy areas and is rarely encountered. The yellow rail summers in Canada while wintering on the southeast and gulf coast.

Other cities such as Toronto, Chicago and New York have had success with similar programs to prevent bird strikes. Gorney hopes that as the program continues, increased awareness will bring more building managers and organizations on board.

To find out more about Lights Out Indy, visit [www.lightsoutindy.org](http://www.lightsoutindy.org).

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