



For Immediate Release
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Protected Wading Bird Dies in Collision with a Window in Toronto



Toronto – On September 29, 2010, a migrating American Bittern, a large wading bird protected under the Migratory Bird Convention Act, was found dead below the façade of the Royal Conservatory. The bird died from head injuries sustained on impact with the windows that line the corridor between the Royal Ontario Museum and the Conservatory.

The American Bittern belongs to the same family of birds as the Great Blue Heron. The bittern’s body is the size of a small dog. Its wingspan stretches four feet. It is not hard to imagine the sickening sound when a bird this size hits a window.

“I usually spot a couple of birds on this same deck,” said John, “but this morning, I didn’t know what I was looking at. At first, I thought it was an owl. I dashed down to retrieve the bird for FLAP.” John, who works at the ROM, spotted the dead bird crumpled on a lower deck. That’s when John noticed the long, yellow beak, long legs and sharp claws and realized that this migrating bird was unique; the first of its species to be collected by FLAP.

John volunteers for FLAP, the Fatal Light Awareness Program, a non-profit organization founded in 1993 concerned with the safe passage of migratory birds through urban areas. In 17 years of bird rescue, FLAP volunteers have recovered over 47,000 birds from 164 species from building collisions in the GTA. Forty percent of these birds were rehabilitated and released to continue their migration. If not for FLAP, likely none would have survived.

The discovery of the bittern, during the height of this season’s migration period, intensifies alarm about the magnitude of the problem of dying, migrating birds in urban areas. On one particularly fatal morning in a previous season, five hundred birds died in six hours at one location in Toronto. **Recently, between September 29 to October 4, 2010, FLAP volunteers recovered over 500 birds belonging to over three-dozen species from the base of just a few Toronto buildings.**

The problem is two-fold. First, migrating birds are attracted to the bright lights left on overnight in the tall buildings that stand in the way of their instinctive migration path. They either flutter around the lights until they drop from exhaustion, or fly into the buildings themselves and sustain life-threatening, often fatal injury. The second danger to migrating birds is the transparency of windows and the reflective property of windows and mirrored exterior surfaces during the daylight hours. Birds crash into the buildings because they can see their habitat reflected in the glass or they do not see glass as a barrier.

“The issue of birds colliding with windows is now one of the leading causes of bird death across North America. This problem continues despite the well-documented fatalities and the commercially available solutions – a failure of a long-standing and tragic nature,” said Michael Mesure, FLAP Executive Director.

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For more information:
Michael Mesure, FLAP Executive Director 416-366-3527 www.flap.org

Working to Safeguard Migratory Birds in the Urban Environment through Education, Research, Rescue, and Rehabilitation.