

Domino-Busting Sparrow Gets Spot in Museum

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AMSTERDAM, Netherlands

A sparrow that knocked over 23,000 dominoes and almost derailed a world record attempt before being shot dead will be enshrined in the Rotterdam Natural History Museum, the museum said Friday.

The ill-fated bird flew into an exposition center on Nov. 14 and began knocking over tiles that were being set up for "Domino Day" television program before it was killed by an exterminator with an air rifle at the urging of panicked organizers.

The shooting was seen by many as an overreaction, and caused a furor. A Web site was erected in honor of the bird; animal rights groups condemned the killing; and prosecutors opened a formal investigation.

"This sparrow has moved so many people," museum curator Kees Moeliker said. "This was really a high point of Dutch culture, I say with a wink. This was the Netherlands at its smallest."

He said the bird had been kept in a freezer at the Ministry of Justice, after its killing became a criminal matter.

Shortly after the shooting, it emerged that the bird was a house sparrow — a species that, in a strange twist, was placed on the national endangered list last year. Killing one without a permit is illegal.

Although common, the house sparrow's numbers have fallen by more than 50 percent in the past 20 years due to human encroachment on their habitat.

On Friday, public prosecutors in The Hague issued a euro200 (\$235) fine to the exterminator who killed the bird.

"As a professional, he should have known better," they said in a statement.

Moeliker said the bird would now be either stuffed or preserved in alcohol, depending on the condition of its corpse. It is scheduled to go on display as part of an exhibition on sparrows at the end of next year, he said.

The bird will be placed "on top of a box of dominoes, which seems appropriate," he said.

Organizers of Domino Day argued the killing was justified, given that more than 100 people had worked for a month setting up the tiles.

But they held a brief memorial for the bird before the show on Nov. 18, and went on to topple around 4,002,136 tiles, claiming a new record though it has not yet been verified by Guinness World Records.

They initially said they had knocked down 4.1 million, but that was called into doubt by Dutch media after video replays showed a volunteer possibly cheating in order to help a chain keep going at one point.

Organizers discounted the dominoes in that particular segment of the chain, but said they had still beaten their own previous record of 3,992,397, which is approved by Guinness.

On the Net:

<http://www.dodemus.nl>

<http://www.dominodomain.com/>

<http://www.nmr.nl/>

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