

PRESS RELEASE, 27 January 2017

Electrocuted Stone Marten added to Dead Animal Tales exhibition in Rotterdam

The Rotterdam Natural History Museum has added a new specimen to its expanding 'Dead Animal Tales' exhibition: a Stone Marten that caused a short break in running at CERN's Large Hadron Collider, LHC, in 2016. The electrocuted Stone Marten, better known as CERN 'weasel' 2, will be on display next to the world-famous Domino Sparrow that knocked down 23.000 dominoes (sabotaging a world record toppling attempt before being shot), a hedgehog that got fatally stuck in a McDonalds McFlurry pot and an armoured catfish that was swallowed alive but got stuck in a man's throat. The 'Dead Animal Tales' exhibition shows how animal and human life sometimes collide, with dramatic consequences for both.

The LHC, run by the European particle physics laboratory, CERN, is housed in a 27-kilometre long ring-shaped tunnel straddling the Franco-Swiss border near Geneva. There, by colliding proton beams at velocities a shade under the speed of light, researchers gain insights at the frontier of human knowledge. The LHC made headlines in 2012 with the discovery of the Higgs particle, final ingredient of the theory that accounts for the particles and forces of nature that make up the visible Universe.

A marvel of human ingenuity, even the largest machine in the world is not immune from some of the more mundane forces of nature: local wildlife. On 29 April 2016 a Stone Marten (*Martes foina*) collided with a 66,000 volt transformer in an above-ground electrical substation, causing a short circuit that kept the LHC offline for a week. 'Fouines', as they are known in Geneva, are a common cause of electrical incidents in the region, seeming to have a taste for high-voltage installations. Many people will identify with tales of these animals gnawing through the ignition leads of their cars, or even their homes, while animals colliding with electrical substations are a common cause of domestic power cuts.

For the sake of European natural history, the Rotterdam Natural History Museum, as part of its 'Dead Animal Tales' exhibition, took efforts to secure the animal that became known as the 'CERN weasel'. The electrocuted Stone Marten could however not be salvaged.

Then, on 20 November 2016, a second Stone Marten entered CERN territory. CERN 'weasel' 2 jumped the fence of the substation supplying the LHC's ALICE experiment, where it collided with an 18,000 volt transformer. The animal was electrocuted instantly, interrupting the electricity supply that, however, did not prevent the LHC from turning in a record year, recording more data than in the previous three operating years combined. This time the Rotterdam Natural History Museum was able to secure the unfortunate animal for their Dead Animal Tales exhibition, and it was successfully transformed into a fine specimen for display.

Label data: CERN 'weasel' 2 – Stone Marten (*Martes foina*), juvenile female, complete specimen, electrocuted, fur scorched; stomach empty, weight 1120 gram, total length 70 cm, tail 27 cm, hind foot 8.4 cm; France, Rhône-Alpes, Ain, Saint-Genis Pouilly (CERN point #2, ALICE project), 20 November 2016 (catalogue number NMR 9990-003507). Tristan du Pree, Dutch particle physicist, assisted the museum to display this animal.

The Natural History Museum Rotterdam has a special exhibition - **Dead Animal Tales** - that shows how animal and human life sometimes collide, with dramatic consequences for both. It all began with a male mallard duck that crashed into the glass façade of the museum, died, and was immediately 'raped' for 75 minutes by another (very much alive) male duck. Subsequent additions to this exhibition include, amongst others: a hedgehog that got fatally stuck in a McDonalds McFlurry pot; the possibly-last pubic louse on earth; a rat that was screwed to a floor; and another recent addition - an armoured catfish that was swallowed alive but got stuck in a man's throat. The Dead Animal Tales exhibition features what's left of the actual creatures, either stuffed or preserved in alcohol.

Additional information:

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images: <http://www.hetnatuurhistorisch.nl/het-museum/voor-de-pers/persfotos.html>

Other specimens from the Dead Animal Tales exhibition:

<http://www.hetnatuurhistorisch.nl/het-museum/voor-de-pers/persfotos/persfotos-dode-dieren-met-een-verhaal.html>

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