



## Sparrow joins 'raped' duck in Dutch museum

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A unique Dutch double will soon be preserved in the Rotterdam Nature Museum - hailed as "the two most famous tragically dead birds of the 21st century".

The sparrow shot by an enraged domino enthusiast after knocking over 24,000 dominoes lined up for a world record toppling attempt will join another historic feathered corpse, the victim of the first scientifically-documented case of homosexual mallard necrophilia.

Kees Moeliker, the Nature Museum's curator of birds, who was awarded the Ig Nobel prize for improbable research for his seminal paper, *The first case of homosexual necrophilia in the mallard anas platyrhynchos*, took up the case of the sparrow, which convulsed the Netherlands.

The hapless sparrow interrupted an attempt to topple 4 million dominoes, setting off a cascade and so angering one of the participants that he shot it.

A statement from the museum said that, thanks to tenacious lobbying, the counsel for the prosecution in The Hague has decided to hand over the dead sparrow seized by the authorities to the museum.

Mr Moeliker said the sparrow would be either mounted or pickled in alcohol, depending on the damage caused by the fatal shot, and serve as a centre piece of a coming major exhibition about the rise and fall of the house sparrow (*passer domesticus*).

"The domino sparrow is a symbol of the love the Dutch apparently have for this bird, and we will conserve it just like we did with other birds that tell a story, like the mallard duck that was the first ever recorded victim of homosexual necrophilia," he added.

The sparrow is currently in the freezer of a ministerial special agent involved in the investigation of the illegal killing, but will be handed over to Mr Moeliker next week. The house sparrow is an endangered species in the Netherlands, with numbers declining by half during the last two decades.

With scientific precision Mr Moeliker recorded the rape by a mallard of a second male duck, which was killed when it flew into a window at the museum. He speculated that the pair were engaged in a rape flight attempt. "When one died the other one just went for it and didn't get any negative feedback - well, didn't get any feedback," he said. He eventually rescued the corpse after 75 minutes.

His Ig Nobel prize sparked considerable interest in the UK and indeed throughout the world, and a researcher, Jonathan Adams, claimed a British "first" in the field with an account of the necrophiliac rape of a pigeon killed at a road junction in Settle, north Yorkshire, reported in *British Birds* 1987.

Marc Abrahams, editor of the *Annals of Improbable Research (AIR)*, which sponsors the Ig Nobel prizes, said that thanks to Mr Moeliker "the two most famous tragically dead birds of the 21st century will be united".

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