

THE GREEN PAGES

Birds vs. windows: the costly commercial battle continues



By **RUTH HEIL**
Business Journal Columnist

Fighting a crime that goes unnoticed can be very difficult. What if the victim's body was snatched away, and no witnesses came forward to report a senseless murder? There'd be no uproar from the media and no demand for an end — just a tragic loss of life and a perpetrator left on the loose.

What if the dead individual had no name and weighed only two ounces? What if the killer was a window in a building like most others around the world? We don't often see it happen; rarely find a body; and we sometimes only notice a loud crash. When a bird flies into a window, it is almost always lethal.

If only one bird flies into each building, which is a highly conservative estimate, then the United States loses 100

million birds each year. Some estimates raise the number to 1 billion.

Dr. Daniel Klem, Jr., is the professor of biology and professor of ornithology and conservation biology at Muhlenberg College in Allentown. He studies wildlife mortality resulting from the actions of man. He investigates bird strikes extensively and has written many articles with titles like, "Avian Mortality at Windows: The Second Largest Human Source of Bird Mortality on Earth."

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After habitat destruction, windows kill more birds than pollution, hunting, vehicles, energy production and transmission, or domestic cats. Klem writes, "The U.S. would need a comparable 353 Exxon Valdez oil spills each year to match the losses."

"These unintended and unwanted tragedies are removing the planet's most useful, attractive, enjoyable and spiritually uplifting creatures with

which we share the universe. I have the same feeling for the senseless killing of any life, because of the connectedness, especially human, but also all that lives," says Klem.

There is no denying that a bird's song enriches a spring morning, and bird watching is a very popular recreational activity. At Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Kempton, 50,000 visitors contributed more than \$4 million to the local economy in just one year. Meanwhile, crows clean away road kill, and hawks exterminate mice, all free of charge.

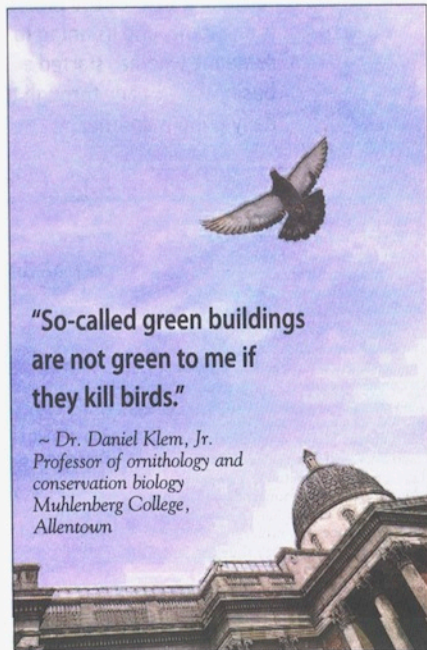
Field experiments that Klem and other scientists have conducted reveal:

- Birds simply do not see clear or reflective glass;
- One out of every two strikes results in a fatality;
- Neither the window pane size or location (suburban, rural, urban) nor the bird's age or size make a difference in the death rate;
- Kill rates increase during migration or feeding times; and
- Casualties are rarely found because they often land in the bushes and are taken by scavengers.

What can be done? It can be difficult to find a product specifically sold as a solution for commercial buildings. However, building managers, architects and landscape design professionals can all make an impact and now have an informative tool at their disposal. The New York City Audubon Society created a document called "Bird-Safe Building Guidelines" which can be downloaded at www.nycaudubon.org/home/BSBGuidelines.shtml.

You can also visit www.birdsandbuildings.com to find answers to many common questions, NYC Audubon's guidelines, and another bird-safe guideline document created by the city of Toronto, Canada.

One solution is the use of ceramic-fritted glass that contains a dot pattern the birds can see. Muhlenberg College has an example in the connecting corridor between its Shankweiler and Trumbower science buildings (above the arch adjacent to the Seegers Student



"So-called green buildings are not green to me if they kill birds."

~ Dr. Daniel Klem, Jr.
Professor of ornithology and conservation biology
Muhlenberg College,
Allentown

Union). It is on the main campus, accessible via the semi-circular, main-line-campus driveway starting from the one-way entrance on Chew Street in Allentown and exiting across from the Theater Arts building.

Information about Dr. Daniel Klem, Jr. and his associates is available on the Internet at aco.muhlenberg.edu/GlassHome.htm. Anyone can help by reporting window strikes via the site's on-line report form. The data will help raise awareness and garner support for action.

Advocates such as Dr. Klem are putting pressure on the U.S. Green Building Council to include points for bird-safe glass and landscaping features in the next version of their popular green building rating system because, "So-called green buildings are not green to me if they kill birds," the professor says.

I would not want to exist in a world absent of bird life. Glass is a proven killer whether we are witness to the death or not. We've made great strides in creating buildings that now generate less pollution and are healthy for inhabitants. Let's add one simple step. Let's unmask this invisible killer.

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