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CHICAGO

Dimming lights saves birds, study says

A two-year study at McCormick Place offers new evidence that turning off the lights in tall buildings could save the lives of thousands of migratory birds, officials announced Wednesday.

Field Museum scientists collected birds killed after striking the windows and found that turning off the interior lights or pulling drapes reduced deaths by 83 percent, said museum ornithologist Mary Hennen.

In 2000 and 2001, Hennen and several colleagues tallied the number of dead birds found

around the building during the spring and fall migration periods—from late March to the end of May and from mid-August to Thanksgiving. They found 1,297 birds died after striking lighted windows, while only 192 died in crashes into unlit windows.

Chicago sits in the path of the Mississippi Flyway, a major migratory route. Many of the birds passing through Chicago fly at night and rely on the stars or the moon for navigation. Building lights disorient them, causing them to fly into windows, Hennen said.