

A Probable Instance of Songbird Collision Mortality

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A probable instance of songbird collision mortality was noted at the First Baptist Church in Stanley, North Dakota on 23 May 1971. This is a white frame building 30 feet high with an unlighted bell tower of the same height (Fig. 1). The church is located on the west side of town, and at night is dimly illuminated by street lights.



FIGURE 1. The First Baptist Church in Stanley, North Dakota, site of songbird mortality. In the background are grain elevators, around which no dead birds were found. View is toward the north.

Weather on 21-23 May 1971 was marked by much drizzling rain, some fog, and temperatures of around 40°F. The wind on the night of 22 May was from the southeast and of relatively light velocity. At 12:10 p.m. on 23 May 1971 a number of dead birds were noted on the church lawn. With the help of children a thorough search was made and 68 birds were found (Table 1). Nearly all of the specimens were located within the church lot, which measured 90 by 130 feet. Most of the birds were found beneath the trees on the south side of the building, but they occurred all around the church and at varying distances from it. The birds apparently had died during the preceding night since they were fresh and no one had noticed them the day before.

TABLE I: DEAD BIRDS FOUND AROUND THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, STANLEY, NORTH DAKOTA, ON 23 MAY 1971.

| Species | Number Found |
|--|--------------|
| Tennessee Warbler (<i>Vermivora peregrina</i>) | 37 |
| Yellow Warbler (<i>Dendroica petechia</i>) | 16 |
| Blackpoll Warbler (<i>Dendroica striata</i>) | 4 |
| Magnolia Warbler (<i>Dendroica magnolia</i>) | 3 |
| House Sparrow (<i>Passer domesticus</i>) | 3 |
| Olive-backed Thrush (<i>Hylocichla ustulata</i>) | 2 |
| Gray-cheeked Thrush (<i>Hylocichla minima</i>) | 1 |
| Ovenbird (<i>Seiurus aurocapillus</i>) | 1 |
| Mourning Warbler (<i>Oporornis philadelphia</i>) | 1 |
| | — |
| | Total: 68 |

The next two hours were spent searching for dead birds at other similar sites in Stanley. City parks were checked, as were areas around several unlighted grain elevators, the only buildings taller than the church, and other large, light-colored buildings and houses. No other specimens were located.

Some of the dead birds were frozen and later taken to the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Jamestown, North Dakota, where necropsies were performed by Gary L. Pearson. Most of the birds examined had hemorrhage within the bones of the skulls and in the lungs. One had hemorrhage in the pharynx, and another had a skin laceration at the base of the neck. Two skulls showed small depression fractures.

These findings, plus the circumstances under which the birds were found, support the conclusion that death was due to collision with the church, probably at night during drizzle or fog. Several long-time members of the church were interviewed, but none recalled a similar incident in the past.