

BIRD-WINDOW COLLISIONS BUILDING MONITORING PROTOCOL

Rochester Institute of Technology | Spring 2026

OVERVIEW

Welcome to *Smash the Crash*. The first RIT phase of our ongoing study of bird-window collisions in Rochester will commence on Monday, April 6th, and continue through Friday, June 5th (subject to change). During that time, you will survey a sample of fifteen academic and residential buildings on campus for signs of window collisions, primarily whole and partial carcasses. Surveys will occur three times per week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) in the early morning (between 7 to 11 AM).

Data will be collected on the location of the collision and the species of bird. At the end of the survey, we will use our data to understand the extent of the bird collision problem at RIT and recommend bird-safe treatments that will help our leaders to better protect our bird population. Observations of these bird-window collisions will be submitted through a form found [here](#).

SURVEY PROTOCOL

For this study, we will focus on surveying the following fifteen buildings on campus:

- 1) Magic Spells Studios
- 2) Thomas Gosnell Hall
- 3) Chester Carlson Center for Imaging Science
- 4) Student Hall for Exploration and Development (SHED)
- 5) Institute Hall
- 6) Golisano Institute of Sustainability
- 7) Grace Watson Hall
- 8) Bausch and Lomb Center
- 9) Student Health Center
- 10) Wallace Library
- 11) Max Lowenthal Hall
- 12) Research Lab Building
- 13) Eastman Hall
- 14) ESL Global Cybersecurity Initiative
- 15) Student Innovation Hall

An interactive map of the campus is available [here](#), and a static one, [here](#).

We will survey each building three days per week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) between Monday, April 6th, and Friday, June 5th. This will allow us to develop a reasonable estimate of the number of birds that collide into windows

BIRD-WINDOW COLLISIONS BUILDING MONITORING PROTOCOL

Rochester Institute of Technology | Spring 2026

during spring migration. Although species move at different times, birds in the *Passeri* suborder, or songbirds, are known to be most vulnerable to window collisions, and the majority of songbird migration will occur in this span of time.

The schedule to sign up for building assignments is available [here](#). Ideally, you would select a few buildings that you can monitor three times per week, but if you can only monitor one building and/or only once per week, that is still very helpful. We recommend selecting buildings that you routinely occupy, such as a classroom, laboratory, or dormitory, or those that you pass by regularly. In addition to the 15 required buildings, you are welcome to monitor additional buildings listed on the far right side of the sign-up sheet.

If you cannot conduct a survey during your scheduled shift, it is your responsibility to find a replacement. Contact the survey coordinator *only* if you have already tried to find someone and cannot.

Surveys will occur in the morning. Studies have shown that the majority of collisions occur between 7 and 11 AM and that scavengers (e.g., cats, squirrels, dogs, groundhogs, and birds of prey) tend to avoid taking carcasses until later in the evening. Surveying within this window will help us develop a picture of collisions in the city. If, due to a serious conflict, you cannot survey between 7 and 11 AM, please find a replacement or, if that is not possible, monitor when you can and leave a note in the comments about the late survey.

During your schedule, you will walk the perimeter of the building(s) you have selected, spending 15-30 minutes to scan for signs of window collisions. This will include carcasses (whole and partial), powder down, feather piles, and bodily fluids (e.g., oil and blood). You can do this individually or in pairs, with one of you moving clockwise and another counterclockwise around the building (to help minimize false negatives). Scanning of the building should extend six feet from the walls. Pay close attention to shrubbery and look carefully through ground cover.

Once you have completed your survey, please submit a report using the Survey123 form linked [here](#). You can enter this using your browser, or the Survey123 app. We recommend that you submit this as soon as you have finished.

Here are some instructions for filling out the survey, based on what you might find:

BIRD-WINDOW COLLISIONS BUILDING MONITORING PROTOCOL

Rochester Institute of Technology | Spring 2026

If you find a carcass (whole or partial):

1) Take three pictures:

- a. Dorsal – An image of the back of the bird.
Ensure that the nape, back, and top of the tail are visible.



Figure 1- Image of deceased Tennessee Warbler.
A) Nape; the area just below the head on the back of the bird. B) The back of the bird. C) The topside of the tail.

- b. Lateral – An image of the side of the bird.
A clear image of the face is critical. If possible, choose whichever side of the face is less decayed, particularly around the eye (orbital feathers + supercilium).

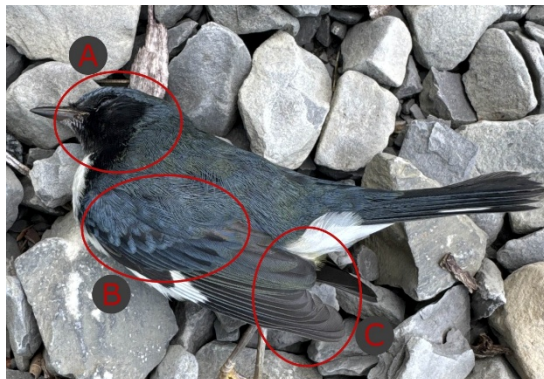


Figure 2 - Image of deceased Black-Throated Blue Warbler.
A) Face. B) Covert feathers of the wing; generally, the most colorful part of the wing. C) Primary feather projection; shape of the wing. Shape is more visible when wing is extended.

BIRD-WINDOW COLLISIONS BUILDING MONITORING PROTOCOL

Rochester Institute of Technology | Spring 2026

- c. Ventral – An image of the belly of the bird.
Both the breast and the underside of the tail should be visible and in focus.

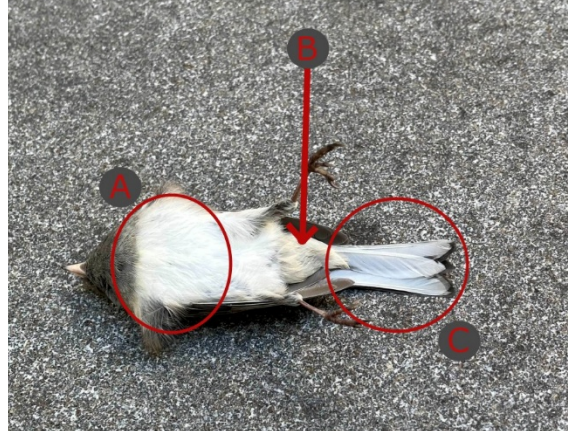


Figure 3- Image of deceased Dark-Eyed Junco.
A) Breast; often streaky or patterned, more so than the rest of the belly. B) Undertail coverts; often monochromatic. C) Underside of the tail.

The following features should be visible in at least one of the three images taken: the legs, tail, wing(s), and beak.

You should use gloves to position the bird. This will help with species identification.

Make sure the image is taken in natural/white light to ensure that the color is not altered. This may mean moving where you take the image from to prevent yourself from casting a shadow on the bird.

- 2) Fill out every answer of the Survey123 form.

Field guides (e.g., the *Field Guide to Eastern Birds* or National Geographic's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*) can aid with species identification, or you could use Merlin ID, iNaturalist, or Google Image. If you are uncertain, please write "unknown".

- 3) Remove the carcass:

A) If the carcass is intact (no decomposition):

BIRD-WINDOW COLLISIONS BUILDING MONITORING PROTOCOL

Rochester Institute of Technology | Spring 2026

Contact the survey coordinator with the species and a photograph. Upon approval, you may collect the bird in a Ziploc bag and transport it to Dr. Susan Pagano for specimen collection (GOS-1179).

B) If the carcass is whole, but decomposed, or partial:

Please remove the carcass however you are most comfortable, using gloves. You may dispose of it in a waste receptacle, move it away from the building and into a wooded area to decompose, or bury it, however you see appropriate.

If you do not feel comfortable moving the bird, note this in the comments so that we can avoid duplicates later during our data analysis.

If you find feather piles, powder down, or bodily fluids:

- 1) Fill out every answer of the Survey123 form EXCEPT the photo section. You do NOT need to take any photos. You do not need to move or interact with the evidence.
- 2) Submit.

If you find multiple forms of evidence of collision:

- 1) Submit one report per piece of evidence. Once you complete the first survey, you will be prompted to submit a second report.

If you find nothing:

- 1) Fill out the first four required questions of the Survey 123 form (name, email, date, report). On the “report” question, mark “no.”
- 2) Submit.

If you find a live bird (injured or stunned):

On occasion, you might find an injured bird or witness a collision yourself. If this happens, please follow FLAP Canada’s [protocol](#) for handling injured birds and then call one of the wildlife rehabilitators listed below. Do NOT handle birds of prey. If you are uncomfortable handling a live bird, please contact your survey coordinator.

BIRD-WINDOW COLLISIONS BUILDING MONITORING PROTOCOL

Rochester Institute of Technology | Spring 2026

Charlotte “Charli” Rohack 409.974.1840
Kris Forsythe-King 315.374.4542

Richard Fadok 508.838.9338

If you submit a report and realize you made a mistake:

- 1) Submit a second report, using the correct answers.
- 2) Write in the “comments” section of the Survey123 form that the first report was a mistake.

SAFETY, PRIVACY, & OTHER CONCERNS

Handling live or dead birds for the purpose of photographs or rehabilitation entails a degree of risk around zoonotic disease transmission. Always wear gloves, particularly if you have any open wounds. Wash your hands with sanitizer after.

Note: Plastic gloves will be available in Dr. Richard Fadok’s mailbox in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. You can find this on the third floor of Eastman Hall. The department suite is open from 9 AM to 5 PM, Monday through Friday.

Brown paper bags (for transporting live birds) and Ziploc / grocery bags (for storing intact specimens) will also be available.

It is possible that you might find a bat during your survey, either on the ground or low on a building. Bats might carry rabies, so it is important that you leave it alone and contact the survey coordinator for assistance.

Be aware of inclement weather and other adverse environmental conditions. If bad weather is predicted during the scheduled time, please go earlier, or later, and note this in your report.

Please respect the privacy of building occupants. We have sought permission from facilities to conduct our survey, but it is important that you remain quiet and do not peer into the windows, particularly around classrooms and dormitories.

Do not use your cell phones except to take photos and upload data. This will not only distract from the survey but also potentially disrupt building occupants. If you

BIRD-WINDOW COLLISIONS BUILDING MONITORING PROTOCOL

Rochester Institute of Technology | Spring 2026

have to use your phone for a call or text, please pause and resume the survey when you have finished.

As you monitor the buildings for evidence of collisions, you might get odd looks or curious inquiries. Consider this an opportunity to educate others about the problem. You can always direct someone to our [website](#) or to the study coordinator if you do not have an answer. If anyone harasses you, call the study coordinator immediately. Campus security will also be aware of our study if you wish to contact them for help in the event of harassment.

SUPPLIES

Please bring the following:

- 1) a smart phone
- 2) disposable gloves
- 3) brown paper bags
- 4) hand sanitizer
- 5) gallon-sized Ziploc bags
- 6) plastic grocery bags

HELPFUL LINKS

[Study Website](#)

[Sign-Up Sheet](#)

[Observation Form](#)

[View Current Results](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was adapted from the protocol developed by Hager and Cosentino (2014) and later developed further by the [Duke University Bird Collision Project](#). It also draws on protocols made by [FLAP Canada](#) and the [American Bird Conservancy](#) for building monitoring.

**BIRD-WINDOW COLLISIONS
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Rochester Institute of Technology | Spring 2026

It was drafted by Dr. Richard Fadok and then later updated by Daniel McDermott, Richard Fadok, and Bryden Kerchoff.