

US news

Flaco, New York City's beloved owl, dies after striking building

The bird escaped last year after vandals damaged his enclosure at Central Park Zoo



Flaco, an escaped eagle owl, seen in Central Park last year. The bird has died after hitting a building in New York City, officials say. Photograph: Andrew Lichtenstein/Corbis/Getty Images

Ramon Antonio Vargas
Sat 24 Feb 2024 06.20 GMT

Email link

The Eurasian eagle owl named Flaco, which **escaped** New York City's Central Park Zoo last year, has died after crashing into a building in Manhattan, officials said late on Friday.

Flaco went down after striking a building on **West 89th Street** and people reported the injured owl to the Wild Bird Fund (WBF), **a statement** from the Central Park Zoo said. WBF staffers soon found Flaco unresponsive and pronounced him dead at the scene.

Central Park Zoo officials said they went to pick up Flaco's remains after being notified of his death by the WBF. The remains were then taken to the Bronx Zoo to undergo a necropsy.

The Central Park Zoo's statement said its staff still hoped that the **New York** police department was able to arrest whoever vandalised Flaco's enclosure on 2 February last year, allowing the owl to escape the place where he had been an exhibit for 13 years and live in the wild.

"The vandal who damaged Flaco's exhibit jeopardised the safety of the bird and is ultimately responsible for his death," the zoo's statement said.

Flaco was rescued by the zoo in 2010, when he was less than a year old. He was reputed to be the only owl of his kind in the wild in North America, and there were widespread fears he ultimately wouldn't survive for long outside captivity.

During the year and nearly three weeks he spent in the wild, he demonstrated the ability to catch rats in the park. And his ability to fly strengthened.

The zoo attempted to recapture Flaco with bait and recordings of eagle-owl calls. Those tricks attracted interest from Flaco, but he never fell for them, prompting the zoo **to abandon** those efforts within a couple of weeks of the owl's escape.



Freedom has been a hoot, but can Flaco the owl survive New York City?

Read more

Flaco spent most of his time in the wild in and near Central Park as well as at other locations across Manhattan. The Central Park Zoo said its staff monitored him throughout his days of freedom "and were prepared to recover him if he showed any sign of difficulty or distress".

Owls like Flaco are mostly solitary and usually interact with other animals only during breeding season, leading some to speculate that the bird was in search of love whenever he ventured away from Central Park.

As recently as **as November**, Flaco took in a sunny afternoon in Central Park, yawning, stretching and preening his feathers while largely ignoring a crowd of spectators.

A crowd of people gather to look at Flaco in Central Park in New York last year. Photograph: Seth Wenig/AP

"We appreciate all the support and concern over the wellbeing of Flaco throughout the past year and the many people who contacted us with updates," the Central Park Zoo said on Friday. "We especially appreciate the quick response by the staff of the Wild Bird Fund in their attempt to help Flaco."

News of the owl's death caused an intense reaction on social media. More than 1,000 users reposted the zoo's announcement of Flaco's death on X, formerly known as Twitter.

"This is an immense loss," read one comment that summarised the sentiments of many on the platform. "I'm so grateful for everyone who came together to witness Flaco's incredible journey."

Another X user suggested tearing down the building where Flaco crashed.

The Eurasian eagle-owl is one of the larger species. Flaco's wingspan was reported to be about 6ft (1.8m).

Federal officials **estimate** that up to one billion birds in the US die annually after accidentally flying into buildings' windows.

In October 2020, ornithologist Stephen Ambrose **wrote on LinkedIn** that there was evidence light glare from city buildings' windows could blind owls momentarily and increase their risk of crashing into the structures, especially at night.

Explore more on these topics

- US news
- New York
- Birds
- Wildlife
- Animals
- news

Email link

Reuse this content

Advertisement

MODIO
By LogiSon
GUESTROOM ACOUSTIC CONTROL

NOTHING SOUNDS BETTER THAN A GOOD NIGHT'S REST

LEARN MORE

Most viewed

