

Peckish bird briefly downs big atom smasher

9 November 2009



The LHC tunnel

A peckish bird briefly knocked out part of the world's biggest atom smasher by causing a chain reaction with a piece of bread, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) said Monday.

Bits of a French loaf dropped on an external electrical power supply caused a short circuit last week, triggering failsafe devices that shut down part of the cooling system of the giant experiment to probe the secrets of the universe, [CERN](#) said.

The system was restored several hours after the incident last Tuesday while the multi-billion dollar [Large Hadron Collider](#) was barely affected, a spokeswoman said.

"The bird escaped unharmed but lost its bread," CERN said in a statement.

"On Tuesday 3 November, a bird carrying a baguette bread caused a [short circuit](#) in an electrical outdoor installation that serves sectors 7-8 and 8-1 of the [LHC](#)," it added.

"The knock-on effects included an interruption to the operation of the LHC cryogenics system."

The 27 kilometre-long (17 mile) particle collider, which runs in a circular tunnel under the French-Swiss border near the city of Geneva, has been plagued by problems since it was briefly started up in September 2008.

However, CERN said the latest incident was minor and did not affect attempts to restart the accelerator later this month following repairs.

"It made for a small warming from absolute zero (minus 273 degrees Celsius, minus 459 degrees Fahrenheit) on the Celsius scale to minus 268 degrees but the machine was not stopped," CERN spokesman Renilde Vanden Broek told AFP.

"Everything returned to normal a few hours later and operations were able to resume in the night of November 5," she added.

Designed to shed light on the origins of the universe, the LHC at CERN took nearly 20 years to complete and cost six billion Swiss francs (3.9 billion euros, 4.9 billion dollars) to build.

The bird was believed to be an owl.

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APA citation: Peckish bird briefly downs big atom smasher (2009, November 9) retrieved 22 September 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-11-peckish-bird-briefly-downs-big.html>

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