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Large Hadron Collider shut down by a Weasel!

A small mammal has sabotaged the world's most powerful scientific instrument.

The [Large Hadron Collider](#), a 17-mile superconducting machine designed to smash protons together at close to the speed of light, went offline overnight. Engineers investigating the mishap found the charred remains of a furry creature near a gnawed-through power cable.

"We had electrical problems, and we are pretty sure this was caused by a small animal," says Arnaud Marsollier, head of press for [CERN](#), the organization that runs the \$7 billion particle collider in Switzerland. Although they had not conducted a thorough analysis of the remains, Marsollier says they believe the creature was "a weasel, probably." (Update: An [official briefing document](#) from CERN indicates the creature may have been a marten.)

The shutdown comes as the LHC was preparing to collect new data on the Higgs Boson, a fundamental particle [it discovered](#) in 2012. The Higgs is believed to endow other particles with mass, and it is considered to be a cornerstone of the modern theory of particle physics.

Researchers have seen some hints in recent data that other, yet-undiscovered particles might also be generated inside the LHC. If those other particles exist, they could revolutionize researcher's understanding of everything from the laws of gravity, to quantum mechanics.

Unfortunately, Marsollier says, scientists will have to wait while workers bring the machine back online. Repairs will take a few days, but getting the machine fully ready to smash might take another week or two. "It may be mid-May," he says.

Weasel image via Shutterstock.

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