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In the News

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In the News

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Bird dogs of a different feather

A report from the website of *10 Connect News* of Tampa, Florida, reported that a bird-chasing border collie, a breed of dog, is being used to harass birds at airports. The dog is just 1 part of MacDill Airforce Base's safety management program to reduce damage at airfields.

The collie's handler, John Gilber, described the border collie as "obsessive–compulsive. . .



Flocks of birds, such as these brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) taking flight at an airport runway, pose a serious threat to aviation. Border collie dogs at MacDill Air Force Base near Tampa, Florida, are being employed as an effective means to keep birds away.

It has to either work or it has to play. It has to have something to do."

Border collies are a common breed used in harassing wildlife at airfields across the country. In addition to using the dogs, airport managers use pyrotechnics and habitat modification to decrease the attractiveness of the airport to birds. Since adding the harassment dogs to its hazard management plan, the airfield has cut down runway closings by 75%.

Bird strikes with aircraft not only threaten the lives of people on board and on the ground, they can also cost taxpayers thousands of dollars for grounded or damaged aircraft. Maj. David Eisenbrey, who heads MacDill's safety office, was quoted as saying that a bird strike "is basically like a 5-pound cannonball hitting the aircraft. [Our] planes can survive a single bird strike, but if a flock plows into a wing or

gets pulled into an engine, it has the power to bring down the aircraft and its crew."

Recent bird strikes from around the world

➔ The *Aviation Herald* reported on 2 incidents in late November 2008 involving bird–aircraft collisions. A Wizz Air Airbus A320-200 flying from Bucharest, Romania, to Valencia, Spain, with 141 passengers on board, encountered a flock of birds as it climbed to 1,371 m after takeoff from Bucharest's Baneasa Airport. The crew heard a loud bang from the left engine and felt the plane vibrate, then they shut down the engine and declared an emergency. The crew diverted the plane to Bucharest's International Airport in Otopeni and landed safely 12 minutes after takeoff.

➔ Another recent incident reported by the *Aviation Herald* occurred in Denver, Colorado, when a Frontier Airlines Airbus A319-100 flying to Seattle, Washington, struck a bird during takeoff from Denver International Airport. The crew decided to return to Denver, where the airplane landed safely.

➔ Several newspapers reported a strike in Rome, Italy, between a Ryanair Boeing 737-800 and a flock of starlings in November 2008. The *Air Transport Intelligence* reported that the plane suffered damage to its left wing, undercarriage, and fuselage after striking the starlings during the landing approach. The *Mirror* of London



Ryanair Boeing 737-800 in Rome, Italy, after hitting a flock of starlings. Notice bird-strike marks on fuselage and the engine (right) resting on the runway.

reported that passengers heard a loud bang and saw flames outside the aircraft as the plane shook violently. The left side landing gear was broken by the impact, leaving one of the engines resting on the runway. Exiting passengers reported seeing blood and feathers along the plane's fuselage. In Italy, >600 bird strikes are reported each year. However, this recent strike is one of the most serious involving a civilian jet.

Pilot lands plane in Hudson River

One of the most widely-reported recent bird-strike disasters occurred on January 15, 2009, in New York City. The incident involved US Airways Flight 1549 with 155 people on board. The passenger jet's engines were shut down after ingesting several Canada geese just after takeoff from LaGuardia Airport. The pilot was able to glide the plane to a safe crash-landing in the nearby Hudson River. All passengers and crew members survived. This incident greatly increased public awareness of bird-strike hazards.

Working together to solve human–wildlife conflicts

In November 2008, *The New Press* reported on a plan by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) in Elwood, Kansas, for a wildlife area that would have caused problems for the nearby Air National Guard (ANG) base and the airport for the city of St. Joseph. Originally, the plan was to enhance a 405-ha area south of Elwood for deer and waterfowl. However, this area is in the flight path of one of the runways at the Rosecrans Memorial Airport, Missouri. Col. Mike McEnulty, the Advanced Airlift Tactics Training Center commander, told news reporters that they use that runway for flying low for assault practice and that the wildlife area presents an increased bird–aircraft-strike hazard. The COE was able to revise its plan to include trees and grasses that are less attractive to waterfowl. A consultant for the ANG also recommended that native grasses and other non-grain alternatives be used to reduce waterfowl hazards. The ANG and the city will also work with agencies to determine if a Federal Aviation Administration-approved fence could be erected to prevent wildlife entry at Rosecrans.



Remote-controlled airplane models may be more effective if they simulate the shapes of real birds of prey, such as the live raptor in this photo.

Robo falcon: wave of the future for airport safety?

The *AvioNews* reported on a predator model radio-controlled airplane that is being evaluated as a harassment tool to repel birds from Guidonia's military airfields in Italy. The remote-controlled aircraft was made to look like a falcon. Raptor Internacional provided a briefing and then an on-site demonstration of the capabilities of the predator model. The model was effective in repelling several different species of birds on the airfield.

FAA releases bird-strike data

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which had denied requests for release of recent bird-strike statistics, agreed to release them to news media after the dramatic and widely-publicized US Airways Flight 1549 bird-strike incident over New York in January 2009 (see related story). According to *USA Today* and other U.S. media, the data indicated that the number of bird strikes in the United States increased 62% from the 1990s to 2007. The FAA allegedly was concerned that the public would misinterpret the bird-strike reports, according to *ABC News*, Chicago. Statistics of bird-strikes and other wildlife strikes are included in the FAA's National Wildlife Strike Database through 2008.

(Photos courtesy USDA/Wildlife Services)

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