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Evaluation and Mitigation of Bird Hazards in Ex-Vaso de Texcoco: The Proposed Site of a New International Airport for Mexico City

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If Mexico is to meet increasing demands for air travel, a new international airport for Mexico City must be constructed. At the request of the Secretaria de Comunicaciones y Transportes (SCT), we evaluated Ex-Vaso de Texcoco (EVT), one of several sites considered for construction of the new airport, to determine if birds would pose an unacceptable risk to aircraft. Aerial (by helicopter) and ground surveys were conducted on 6 occasions during fall and winter from 1996-2002 to census birds and evaluate aquatic habitats at EVT and other locations in the Valley of Mexico. Total populations estimates for waterfowl and shorebirds using EVT ranged from 29,000 to 77,000 (mean = 48,300). The majority of birds observed (70%) were south of the Carretera Peñon Texcoco (CPT), the highway that bisects EVT. The wetlands north of the CPT contained about 3% of the ducks and 3% of the coots in the Mexican Highland's wintering population. We concluded that an airport could be constructed in EVT north of the CPT without a significant bird-strike threat, provided habitats attractive to birds were not allowed within 3.2 km of the airport's aircraft movement areas, and conditions were not created that would encourage birds to over-fly the airport or move into or through the airport's approach/departure airspace. We recommended that wetland losses due to airport construction north of CPT should be off set by enhancing and expanding wetlands identified elsewhere in the Valley of Mexico to ensure no net loss of wetlands within the valley. Our investigation of bird issues was only one of numerous technical and economic studies conducted regarding the site selection and design of the new airport for Mexico City. Based on the conclusions of all these studies, of which birds were only one factor, an area in EVT north of CPT was selected in October 2001 as the site for the new airport. Our study demonstrated the importance of including the evaluation of bird hazards in the site-selection and design phases for any airport.