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BIRD PROBLEMS AT MILITARY AIRPORTS

B. W. Brink
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Scott Air Force Base, Illinois

I notice by the program that this was to be a progress report, new aspects of control. I'd like to narrow the scope a little bit, at least for my remarks; they will be essentially confined to activities of MAC, Military Airlift Command. There are 10 major commands in the Air Force. I'd like to reduce the word progress to lower case letters, at least; and I'd like to deemphasize the word new, for most of these things are not brand new for us.

The scope of this problem is world wide, air force wide; and I'm going to confine my remarks essentially to activities on MAC bases, of which there are ten in the continental United States and two island bases, Kindley AFB on Bermuda and Lodges in the Azores. But we'll take a brief look at this on a world wide basis just to orient ourselves.

If we can project previously reported data, we can forecast the bird strike problem for 1968 about as follows: the Air Force expects about 400 bird strikes, they're going to cost us a little over \$10 million, there's going to be at least one fatality, and at least eight fliers will be injured to some degree. Air Force study number 21-68 showed that last year there were 379 bird strikes on a world wide basis, of which two were major. These two alone cost \$740,000; one pilot was lost in flight, one aircraft completely destroyed. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on where these occurred, part of the craft impacted, the phase of flight, and other data of this sort; this has already been pretty much repeated and hashed over.

For better understanding of this problem I'd like to quote at least one terse report. "This was a T-38 type of aircraft, speed 250 knots, flight phase in lap down into traffic pattern, type of bird unknown." This is all too frequent-"type of bird unknown." "Pilot made a radio call for entry into traffic pattern, no contact. Aircraft crashed from steep dive; bird feathers and tissue recovered from cockpit and canopy. Investigating board considered that the pilot was incapacitated by a bird strike at the time of crash. One fatality."

Fortunately not all of these bird strikes are this serious. I'd like to quote a couple more here, at least in part. "C-141 (that's the backbone of the Airlift Command) report from Turkey. Number two wingman of flight hit by two storks at touchdown." I guess the moral of that is watch out for the stork; it has a little different meaning here. Here's another one I'd like to share with you: "C-135 from Spain. Investigation revealed 34 separate bird strikes; birds involved

were known locally as bustards." Unofficially it was reported that the radio transmission was monitored and it said, "You bustards get out of the way."

Now I'd like to come to the problem as it affects Military Airlift Command only and I'd like to project or at least give some idea of what we expect for this year. For the first half of 1968 MAC only (of 10 major commands) reports a total on a world wide basis of 125 bird strikes, of which 44 were in the United States. Elsewhere there were 21 except for 60 strikes at Midway Island. I'll remark more about Midway Island later; this must be the classic "worst place" world wide. Dover Air Force Base is our worst MAC base; we had ten strikes during the first half of 1968.

There are some sidelights to this bird-strike business and I'd like to repeat a few of them. In Dover, Delaware, the Air Force base was closed for a period of seven hours on 23 August, 1965, when a very innocent little bird, the tree swallow; due to a unique weather pattern, gathered on the runway so thickly as to shut it down. Here's another one: the C-141, (the one with the high tail, I'm sure many of you are familiar with it) has, where the two rudders are hinged, five holes between quarter and half-dollar size. During the nesting time of year at Dover and Charleston Air Force bases they keep a man busy digging starling nests out of these holes. Here's an interesting one also: inspection vents were removed during the time of maintenance at Scott Air Force Base, and sparrows had built nests in the vents after they were taken off. This doesn't speak too well for how fast maintenance moves, but in these nests were bits of safety wire collected, I imagine, from in among the controls.

California weed control presented kind of an interesting problem where an herbicide was used to destroy weeds in certain parts of the runway and along the lighting and fences. This herbicide eliminated all the weeds except one, turkey mullen, which produces fine bird seed for doves; so we collected a great number of doves in our effort to rid the runways of weeds. At Travis AFB we have an interesting problem. It is reported that somewhere between 5 and 12 million starlings roost on Sherman Island at the mouth of the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers. These birds fan out during their feeding activities and cross right over Travis AFB, over four other Air Force bases, two or three Navy bases, plus the San Francisco Airport and the Oakland International Airport, all within a 50 mile radius of their roost. So you can see that there are a number of interesting sidelights to these things. I think we are now ready for the slides.

This is somewhat typical of our problem. This is a sanitary fill, which may not be too sanitary, about two or three miles off base; and you can see that we have a fair collection of gulls there.

Here's a sanitary fill on Travis Air Force base. The situation is somewhat explainable; notice all the water around. They had a three or four day period where they could not get in to cover all the garbage. You can see there are many gull delectables there, plus a fair collection of gulls. After these gulls tank up on the garbage they go over and rest in the open spaces; this is again at Travis AFB in California.

Here's a good one. These are sewage lagoons, settling lagoons, at Travis again. We collect a fine number of mud hens there; I think you can see some of

them in the center of the picture. This makes a fine habitat for the hens; we don't know whether to get rid of the lagoons or not. This is a real problem.

These are earthworms at Dover AFB, Delaware. I made counts three days after a rain and there was an average of 14 earthworms per square yard. This makes fine attraction for gulls, and we have them.

Here's one of the typical problems you find on air bases along drainage ways. This is a cattail swamp or drainage ditch which needs cleaning out. These things take monies, and they are being done, but it takes a while to do it.

This situation is at Kindley AFB down in Bermuda. The fine weed patch you see is a good place for rodents which bring in owls, hawks, etc. It has been eliminated.

At Charleston AFB, in back of the runway, there is a triangular patch of wooded area and weeds. This is a fine place for deer to run from the main wooded area and cross the runway. We even got an alligator out there one day. Looking at the same spot from the other side you can see the dense vegetation. This has subsequently been eliminated to control the problem.

Here's one that's fairly typical in some places—sluggish drainage ditches. Mallard ducks will readily nest on something such as this even only two or three yards wide. This, too, has been subsequently eliminated.

Here's one that many of you are familiar with. This is a Phragmites stand just off the edge of the base at Dover, Delaware; you can see the runway in the background. This is an active starling roost.

This situation is fairly common and we can do something about what's inside the boundary fence; but unfortunately some of the things done outside the fence, such as borrow pits right off the end of the runway, we have no control over. The contractor was not required to fill these pits in, so we have to live with them until such time as we can do more about them.

This shows a private shooting pond, one mile off the end of the active runway, at Dover AFB. Four thousand geese are collected here. Things like this need to have something done about them. Here again we're getting into politics.

Here is an interesting picture because when Mundy Hook National Wildlife Refuge was conceived no one ever dreamed that being nine miles from Dover Air Force Base would make any difference. I'm sure the refuge was established first; maybe Ki Faulkner could tell us about that. But here's a case where we have the refuge and the air field in close proximity and it isn't good. Here's the kind of habitat you find there, particularly on the eastward and northeastward side of Dover AFB; and when these aircraft are coming in from overseas it makes a very bad situation. The whole coastline along Dover is this way.

We use the carbide exploder shown here being demonstrated by a Fish and Wildlife man and also the shotgun shell crackers or Teleshot shells. This is a technique which is effective if we throw a lot of other techniques along with it. Bird people I'm sure will tell you that the more you throw at the birds, the better your success will be.

Here's the same kind of situation down at Charleston, South Carolina. Here's the use of Avitrol; perhaps some of you in the audience participated in this thing—it was a demonstration down at Charleston. These sea gulls are one

of the chief problems and have been attracted to the area by the sanitary fill, maybe the unsanitary fill, which has been corrected. We wanted to test Avitrol. The material was mixed with bread crumbs as you see in the picture. There is not much on top of the ground in this sanitary land fill; but once the gulls get in the habit of coming there, they continue to come. There were 200-300 gulls estimated there. They had been prebaited and this shows the bait being placed out. This is about three minutes after the bait was placed; you begin to see two or three reactors and hear their calls. The birds become uneasy and begin to move around. This is some fourteen minutes after the bait had been put out. The reactors had done their business; you still see a few there on the site, but those that can have flown away. It took nineteen minutes to completely clear the area.

Now I'd like to get into another phase of this problem. This was taken at McGuire Air Force Base and I think we hold the record—I submit that we have at least four thousand built-in birdhouses. These barracks were built in World War II. The eave vents were originally covered over with screen, but in this kind of climate the screen is no longer there, so it makes quite a nice natural birdhouse. This has been corrected by putting screen back on the eave underside.

Here's a common situation; this is at Scott Air Force Base, home base of the command. Careless workers put in a conduit for cooling in an air conditioning unit and left a hole big enough for nesting and a fine perching place for starlings and sparrows. They perch on the hole and then fly right into the hanger.

Here is another common situation; the pane of window glass in the center of the picture is not there and this makes easy entry. Fred Courtsal helped us with some of the bird work on this hanger; he could tell you more details about it. Maintenance is important.

This slide isn't upside down although it might look like it. This is the superstructure up in the hanger and it makes an ideal site for lots of pigeon nests. In the center you can see one pigeon. These beams have fine places for nesting sites.

Pigeons, on cold days, like to perch out on top of the hanger. This was taken in winter time; and when the hanger doors are opened, the birds dart inside. It takes a lot of money to clean the airplanes and clean the floors, and, of course, the excrement is corrosive to the aircraft skin.

Here is the classic one—the goony birds (black-footed albatross) at Midway Island. These are just off the parking ramp and you can see the high density there. The operations people said, "Should we continue to operate in the daytime or at night?" So we did a little exercise, I think it was mostly exercise, and we computed the number of tons in the wingspread of these goony birds based on the population (these operate in the daytime) as against night flight. We came up with some fantastic figures on how much "bird meat" there was in the air during the daytime with this population versus how few in terms of petrels and other night flying birds. I don't know whether we settled anything because an impact and ingestion at night might be many times worse than one in the daytime. But, in any case, this problem is the most severe of any we have in the Air Force today.

This shows an area just off Midway Island. These sooty terns had formerly been frequenting the area along the runway; and some real smart people there

found that these birds nest among the stones, so they moved the birds. When asked how they moved them, they said, "Well, we left no tern unstoned."

Here is a beautiful bird in its breeding plumage, again at Wake Island. This is the frigate bird, a very beautiful bird. We like to have them; we just like to have them in the right place.

That concludes the slides and I'd like to make a closing remark. We deal with these problems day to day and we're reasonably sure that we're making some headway on them. But I think we have a long way to go and I'd like to close this talk with a story that has no application to bird control at all. This occurred down in the Ozark Mountains. A fellow was driving an odd-looking car and a visitor asked, "What kind of a car is this?" The man answered, "This is a Rolls Canardly." (It looked like an old Chevy and a few other old parts thrown together.) The visitor asked him why he called it a Rolls Canardly. The Ozark mountaineer answered, "Because it rolls downhill but can 'ardly be pushed up the next one." That's the way I feel- I can hardly wait for the next speaker. Thank you.