

YEAR 2000 - FIFTY YEARS SINCE ADAMS

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Abstract

Although not going back to the dawn of time, it is interesting to note that over 50 years ago a report was published reviewing options for bird control on aerodromes in the UK. There has been earlier work but using Adams as a baseline, we can consider how far we have progressed since that time in all areas of aerodrome bird control. The major aim is to encourage everyone to re-evaluate current systems in the hope that simple opportunities are not overlooked in the same way as pigeon distress calls have been.

The majority of bird strikes occur on or close to aerodromes and in the UK, involve common, social, flocking species that are not of a very large mass, most are less than 500g. The aerodrome accidents in the UK have been with these same species although strikes with Canada geese have been experienced recently. The methods discussed by Adams in the 1949 report have been evaluated and developed and it is possible to reduce the numbers of the common species present on aerodromes and hence reduce the risk of damage.

Effective aerodrome bird control is possible; the methods exist but is it a practical option? What is preventing it? Fifty years is surely sufficient time to be able to detect a definite reduction in risk? Do we need to examine our own roles to determine where any problem lies?

Many organisations are represented at IBSC and similar conferences worldwide including aircrew, airlines, aerodrome operators, engineers and scientists. Additionally, of course, there are the regulators both national and international. In terms of aerodrome bird control, this represents a very large and diverse group with the ultimate aim of protecting aircraft operations from a narrow strip of tarmac.

Of these many organisations, which are seeking new studies from the scientists and engineers, is it aircrew? Who is seeking better guidance from

the regulators? Are we reaching a point where the major bird strike risk is created by the attitude of people whether informed or not?

A large number of questions.

Key Words: Control-methods, Aerodromes, Organisation, Standards.

Introduction

We are all aware that the problems of birds and aircraft have been present since man decided to join the birds in what was then, their own environment. Mention has been made many times of the death of Cal Rogers after his altercation with a Herring Gull but I think it is sufficient to use 1949 as our baseline, a period of just over 50 years.

In 1949 a report was commissioned for the UK Ministry of Civil Aviation entitled *Experiments in clearing birds from Airfields* and this reviewed the situation to date and provided guidance on such things as removal of food items, letting grass grow long, trials with falcons, testing of various sounds etc. Nearly all of these options were tested and developed in the UK by the mid- to late-1960s.

I mention the UK throughout this short paper and in doing so I do not say that the UK have "got it right!" If this were true then no one from the UK would be at this conference, and I am the first to admit to have in fact, "got it wrong" and probably over more than just pigeon distress calls! My mention of the UK is purely because that is where the bulk of my experience is based.

So if the control options were developed 30 years ago, why are we still facing the same problems as before? How many man-years are represented at a single IBSC conference? How many international conferences have there been since the gathering at Nice? At a recent conference I attended someone made the comparison between the bird problem to aircraft and our capability of putting a man on the moon. Although I thought it facetious at the time, when we consider that techniques were available for on-airfield use 30 years ago, perhaps his example was valid.

I refer to the airfield problem only and my aim, perhaps a naïve one, is to encourage all of us to step back a pace and see where we are going because we have been going for a long time.

Research versus re-search

Research, particularly today, is extremely expensive as all of us are aware and has a function to answer a question.

Who is posing the questions?

I have asked this simple question at previous conferences both as a general pointer and with specific reference to Remains Identification where I quote from 25 years experience. If no one asks for the continuing research it tends to undermine the value of the work, whatever its quality. If only the researcher suggests the research, then all too often the cry of "providing them with more work and income" is bandied around! Additionally, at a previous conference, a scientist asked me whether I thought that "science and scientists" were helping or a hindrance to flight safety? Presumably the comment was a response to efforts to justify new projects.

As long as the customer of the research does not ask the question, such comments will continue.

Re-search is also of value.

We appear until recently, to only value something that is new in the belief that it must be better than what we have already, even if existing systems are efficient.

The basic requirements for aerodrome bird control were suggested 50 years ago and developed 30 years ago so they all need revisiting. We have seen a complete technological change in the way distress calls are broadcast. Thirty years ago the operator pulled a loop of recording tape from a cassette and threaded it through the playback heads before being able to play a distress call. Removal of the cassette was equally laborious whereas today's technology is solid state.

Are those of my generation stifling new younger minds by the "we tried that 20 years ago and it didn't work" dismissal? Again my own prejudice came through on a visit to India where I was introduced to an university professor who had been given a grant to look at electronic systems for bird strike avoidance. I went into "that was tried" mode but had to listen to a very cogent argument on using a system that would give birds the impression that a threat was much nearer to them so that they would move sooner. A remarkably simple concept and I hope that he is supported and successful.

Is this same group displaying arrogance to the extent that we are dictating what is or is not required or possible as I, and others have done over pigeon calls?

The existing techniques were revisited fairly recently in the UK and a report was prepared for the CAA. Although at that time, the trials found nothing new, they served to provide a comparison enabling the CAA to give advice based on current versions.

Who should be posing the questions?

Whoever requires the answer is easy to say but who does need the answer? Aircrew will probably be the first to suffer in a bird problem situation. I know there is a welcome increasing attendance of aircrew representatives at these conferences so this has to be encouraging but who do they ask?

Is there a big control standard laid down that a Captain can refer to?
The airlines and insurance companies foot the bill for any damage, are either of these organisations asking questions in order to increase their profits?
Is the airport operator asking any questions or are they accepting the situation as their responsibility and getting on with it using whatever they have at their disposal?
There are probably very many more including the changing functions of the Regulators.

I had no problem looking back on my own role and was given a salutary lesson on pre- or misconceived opinions on pigeon distress calls and modern generations of light forms. There are probably others if I dare to step back further. Has my own attitude been of help or a hindrance, no doubt others will tell me soon enough but what about yours?

Perhaps we are getting to the point where more time is spent justifying a proposal for any aspect of this necessary flight safety function than getting on with the day to day job of routine airfield bird control.

Reference

Adams F. R., 1949. Experiments in clearing birds from Airfields. Ministry of Civil Aviation Extra Mural Report. London.