

BIRD STRIKE PROBLEMS AT BEN-GURION INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, LOD - ISRAEL.

by Sh. Suarctz, Israel.

There were not many bird strikes at Ben-Gurion airport, but from time to time there was an incident, usually when a bird was sucked into a jet engine during landing or take-off. Of four cases when remains of birds were found, three were of partridges which proves that not only the gulls (*Larus ridibundus*), which are here in winter only, are a potential danger but mainly the partridges which are present throughout the year, and of course also some other species of birds.

Unfortunately, the airport management agreed to employ only one of our people to operate the measures against bird strike, and for a limited period of 3-4 months only, as they believed that only the gulls are dangerous, whereas I insisted time and again that it is necessary to employ a man all the year round.

Therefore I cannot present to-day any new proposals or ideas for the prevention of bird strike, as our work was confined to the day-to-day operation of the usual preventive measures such as gas-cannons, distress calls, models etc. and was mainly based on experiences abroad with little opportunity to develop new methods suitable to our local conditions.

At the same time trials with the bird repellent "Reta" were continued, not only with "Reta" alone but also combined with the other above mentioned measures so as to employ every possible means to avoid accidents altogether or at least to reduce the risk of damage. Unfortunately, so far the results are not conclusive, and we cannot yet say definitely that it is worthwhile to use this repellent. Based on our limited experience I have come to the conclusion that there are species of birds which - under certain conditions - are more affected than others, but in many cases the effectiveness depends very much upon the availability of a suitable and convenient alternative for the birds with regard to food, roosting etc.

As the spraying with "Reta" was partly done without the supervision and control by a biologist and a great part of the treatment was only studied by the suppliers, I have some doubts as to the reliability of the results. With all due respect for their know-how, we have to remember that their commercial interests are involved. My policy in this respect was to encourage their work in every way but to keep an open mind and draw my own conclusions. As a matter of fact, I know only of one case of reliable and significant success:- On the 19th February 1976 after several treatments and sprayings with "Reta" on the municipal garbage dump of Yahoud which is near one of the main runways of the airport (26-08) we employed all the different deterrent methods at our disposal and succeeded within an hour to get rid of about 200 gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) which had settled on the garbage dump. I am sure that the strong effect was due to the combination of all measures, "Reta", gas-cannons, distress calls and shot-guns. There is no doubt, however, that the proximity of the huge garbage dump of Hirya at a distance of about three kilometres from the airport provided a convenient alternative, and the gulls which were driven away probably joined the thousands of gulls there. We have to ask ourselves:-

(1) Would we have achieved the same effect without this alternative?

(2) Would we have achieved the same effect with "Reta" alone?

These questions will have to be checked properly.

As I pointed out, so far our possibilities in this respect were limited, but I hope that we shall be able to do so in the near future.

The experience in many countries has shown that the cheapest and easiest way to reduce the possible dangers of bird strike is to remove the sources of food for the birds from the vicinity of the airport. Unfortunately, the people who fix the budgets are not easily convinced and, therefore, plans are either not executed at all or postponed, at great expense in terms of risk and damage and also in cost of the measures necessary to avoid these dangers.

Thanks to a budget for research on this subject which we have now obtained for the first time, we shall try - within the framework of the Nature Reserves Authority - to solve our special problems, in addition to our regular work at the airport. One of the subjects will be to study the effectiveness and reliability of the bird repellent "Reta" on different species of birds and, of course, at different seasons under the special conditions of the area.

In addition we shall look into the possibility to find or to develop suitable sources of food which will attract the birds and draw them away from the area of the airport, thus contributing to the success of our operations.

I hope that at the next meeting I shall be able to present a summary of our work with definite conclusions which will help us to achieve our most important aim:-

To avoid accidents and damage.

Shalom Suaretz
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