DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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WILDLIFE BIOLOGISTS JOIN AVIATION EFFORT TO PREVENT BIRD/PLANE COLLISIONS

The Federal Aviation Administration and the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have stepped up measures to prevent collisions between planes and birds and to further advance airline passenger safety.

The two agencies have signed a formal agreement that will facilitate additional technical assistance and training of airport personnel by the Fish and Wildlife Service for individual airports with serious safety problems caused by birds and other vertebrates. FAA will also cooperate in these training programs and possibly will sponsor additional research by the Interior agency to find improved ways to reduce this country's annual 1,200 "bird strikes."

Bird strikes cost an estimated $20 million each year in damage to military and civilian aircraft. A 4-pound bird striking a plane moving at 500 miles per hour impacts with a force of 80,000 pounds and has been known to shatter a windscreen and badly dent the opposite cabin bulkhead. More often, however, birds are sucked into the jet engines, which can be instantly knocked out.

Bird strikes, or collisions, have also been blamed for the loss of 140 human lives in this country since such recordkeeping was started in the 1940's. The most serious accident to date occurred in 1960 in Boston

(over)

where 62 persons died after their commercial airliner flew into a flock of starlings. In the past few years, several jetliners have been more fortunate when struck, successfully landing after their engines quit.

Most bird strikes occur during take-off and landings but the birds are also a threat in the air during the spring and fall migration season when millions of ducks, geese, swans, and other birds migrate in dense formations at altitudes as high as 20,000 feet. Bird populations at airports also swell significantly at these times.

Situated in many cases near water, mudflats, or marshy areas and quite often close to solid waste disposal sites, airports also attract birds because of architectural features that invite roosting, and decorative pools that birds use for bathing and drinking. Other attractions include standing water on runways or adjacent areas, tall grasses, fruit trees, and other vegetation, and the related insect and rodent food supply.

The Fish and Wildlife Service will advise airports on how to make areas less attractive to birds and will train airport personnel in proper maintenance and dispersal techniques. Some of the techniques are relatively simple and inexpensive and are already in use at several airports, including John F. Kennedy International in New York which has one of the largest concentrations of gulls on the East Coast.

Simple techniques include draining pools, filling in low spots on runways, removing certain trees and shrubbery, and cutting grasses to certain heights. Other techniques include relocation of existing garbage dumps that may be in air traffic corridors, and operating regular motor patrols of the runways to disperse birds. Dispersal methods such as distress calls and explosive noise devices are also used to reduce the risk of bird strikes. All of these deterrents are aimed at denying food, water, and roosting areas to the birds in an effort to make them seek other, safer habitats--safer for themselves and the millions of people who use airports daily.

Airports that serve commercial airlines are required to have an adequate bird hazard control program as a condition of their annual certification by FAA. The agency monitors compliance continually and inspects the program yearly.

The Memorandum of Agreement between FAA and the Fish and Wildlife Service took effect October 15, 1978, and includes cooperative efforts to identify other wildlife hazards at airports such as deer. The agreement establishes procedures for planning, developing, and implementing management programs designed to minimize property damage and possible loss of life. Fish and Wildlife Service research data and other current information will be disseminated by FAA to the aviation industry as another means to increase awareness, and in turn, to obtain the industry's assessment of the effectiveness of current recommendations. FAA will also identify airports with vertebrate pest problems and cooperate in the development and support of new techniques and training programs.

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