

**THE BIRD STRIKE IMPLICATIONS OF LOW-COST AIRLINES
USING SMALLER AIRPORTS**

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Abstract

In the three years since the last IBSC meeting, there has been a radical change in European skies with low-cost airlines now a major factor. A number of these airlines are now providing services to regional towns and cities that previously were not served by jet aircraft and the local bird population may be used to smaller, slower turboprop aircraft. Furthermore, because of the lack of landing slots at the 'main' airport, or because of need to keep costs down, some airlines are serving the capital cities via smaller airports sometimes many miles from the city. In both the above cases, it may be that the pressing need for passenger security will mean that resources for bird control may not be given a high priority or may be delegated to inexperienced or untrained staff.

It is concluded that the airport operators and Regulatory Authorities must take account of the new situation and be aware of their responsibilities. A lack of 'duty of care could result in litigation in the event of an incident or accident. Pilots, airport staff, ATC, engineers etc must ensure that ALL bird strikes are reported to the Authority and to the Airport before the situation gets out of hand. Pilots who see birds must not allow commercial pressure to influence them into perhaps taking off without waiting for hazardous birds to be removed.

Key words: airports, bird control, liability, operational procedure, reporting

1. Discussion

1.1 During the three years since the last IBSC meeting there has been a radical change in the skies of Europe in that the low-cost airlines such as Air Berlin, BMI Baby, Easyjet, Flybe, Germanwings, Hapag-Lloyd Express, Ryanair, Virgin Express etc have become a major factor.

1.2 In the UK the low cost airlines are all using major airports. However, in Europe, either because of the lack of landing slots at the major airport or because they have been able to negotiate lower charges, some are using smaller airports sometimes a long way from the city they serve. Some of these airfields have in the past had few, if any, jet operations, and some are shared military bases perhaps only operational from Monday to Friday. The network has also been expanded to include smaller regional airports, which previously may not have had jet airliner operations.

1.3 It is well known that birds habituate to their local situation and will probably be familiar with slower piston and turboprop aircraft. They will now face bigger aircraft, very often twin-engined, with higher take-off and landing speeds. The owners/operators of these smaller airports, mostly within Continental Europe, may not yet have the resources or expertise to deal with bird problems as other matters, such as security, have taken precedence. It is likely that because there have been few bird strikes reported previously, that they feel they do not have a bird problem at that airport. This could be a dangerously false assumption. For example, an operational delay might result in a flight that normally departs in daylight, becoming a dusk departure when the airport inspection team/ATC will not be able to see the hazard. It has already been shown in a UK Court Action (Norwich) that the pilots have other duties and cannot be responsible for runway security. Nevertheless, pilots seeing birds prior to take off must not ignore the problem (the Le Bourget Jet Falcon) but must in spite of commercial pressures, get the birds removed prior to take off. It is well known that complacency is the enemy of safety, the 'it will be alright syndrome'.

1.4 Some airlines have a main operating base that is not in their country of registry, eg. Ryanair are Irish registered and make a high proportion of their flights from London Stansted. This means that the same degree of regulatory oversight might not be possible.

2. Examples of Airports

The low cost network is expanding rapidly and there may well be further growth, the following are typical of the smaller or alternative city airports:

- Aarhus (Denmark)
- Biarritz (France)
- Brussels – Charleroi (Belgium)
- Carcassonne (France)
- Dinard (France)
- Frankfurt – Hahn (Germany)
- Friedrichshaven (Germany)
- Graz (Austria)
- Hamburg – Lubeck (Germany)
- Malmo – Sturup (Sweden)
- Nantes (France)
- Nimes (France)
- Oslo – Torp (Norway)
- Paris – Beauvais (France)
- St Etienne (France)
- Stockholm – Vasteras & Skavsta (Sweden)

3. Conclusions

- Smaller airports must take account of the new situation now that they have regular jet airliner flights. In the event of litigation following damage or an accident, it is unlikely that lack of resources would be upheld by a court as a valid excuse, Duty of Care still applies.
- Regulatory Authorities must monitor the situation and make sure that their safety overview is effective, being properly administered and that airport bird measures are the responsibility of trained, equipped and motivated staff.
- All pilots, engineers ATC etc must report all bird strikes and make sure that the airport is aware of emerging problems before they become serious or possibly catastrophic.
- Pilots who see birds on the airport prior to take off must not allow the intense commercial pressure to prevent them from waiting while the birds are removed. If you think safety is expensive – try an accident.

