

Beware of Birds and Wildlife During This Fall Migration

by Victoria A. Brown

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We have all seen it in the movies that grand exit of the main character of any typical action flick, the glorious take off of the courageous leading man in a small, but capable, plane. As the plane ascends, it flies right through a flock of birds and our leading man flies side-by-side with our winged friends and eventually soars off into the horizon for a perfect ending. Yes, we have all seen it, but we know life isn't like the movies. As much as Hollywood would like you to believe it, aircraft, no matter how big or small, are not invulnerable to birds. A bird strike can be very dangerous and damaging to the aircraft not to mention the bird.

Wildlife or bird strikes aren't a new phenomenon. They have occurred since the beginning of flight. The first ever bird strike was recorded by Orville Wright on September 7, 1905. His plane struck a bird (believed to be a red-winged blackbird) over a cornfield near Dayton, Ohio. Although bird strikes are the most common, they are not the only wildlife threat posed to aircraft. Pilots must always be cautious of ground animals like deer, rabbits, bears, and even reptiles, such as alligators or turtles. According to the July 2007 U.S. Department of Agriculture/Federal Aviation Administration report, Wildlife Strike to Civil Aircraft in the United States 1990-2006, the state of California has the most bird strikes on record with 6,184 reports since 1990. New York and Texas reported the most mammal strikes on record with 134 and 147 strikes respectively, and Florida reported 46 reptile strikes. Surprisingly, New York came in second with 21 reptile strikes. Figures from the FAA Mitigation Web site show that just in the first five months of 2007 there have been more than 2,200 wildlife strikes reported for civil aircraft in the United States.

The majority of wildlife strikes aren't reported. However, since 1990, there have been 83,315 reported wildlife strikes. Of those, 75,731 reports involved civil aircraft and 7,584 reports involved military aircraft at joint use airports. Wildlife strikes cause an estimated \$603 million in damages to U.S. civil aircraft annually.

Bird strikes are most frequent during migration seasons in the fall. With the fall migration season approaching, FAA Aviation News wants to remind you to be extra vigilant. As always preparation and strategic action can help you mitigate wildlife encounters. Here are some tips to help you avoid run-ins with birds and other wildlife.

For Bird Encounters (no matter what shape, size, or number):

Keep all external aircraft lights on. Somehow birds are able to sense airplane lights and

try to avoid them.

Unless close to the ground, pull up and gain altitude whenever possible around birds. Normally, birds tend to dive down to avoid the aircraft.

Allow more than the minimum recommended altitude over bird sanctuaries/refuges/national parks. By having more altitude, the aircraft has a larger buffer zone, which provides more reaction time. The more reaction time the pilot has the better the chance to mitigate or avoid an unplanned encounter. You can find this information along with the locations of sanctuaries at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service <http://www.fws.gov>.

Whenever possible, wear protective eyewear. Even a small piece of debris can cause a major problem to your eyes.

For other wildlife (i.e. deer, elk, moose, fox, coyote, rabbits, wild dogs, and bear):

At airports that have active control towers, you should report any animals spotted in the airport environment. Tower personnel should pass the information to the airport manager's office, which should send someone in a vehicle to chase the animal away.

At non-towered airports, if wildlife is spotted inside the perimeter, you should contact the fixed based operator (FBO). Someone may be available to chase the animal from airport boundaries. Also, listen to the radio at least 10 nautical miles out. There may be someone ahead of you who has already spotted wildlife. This is also good advice for general situational awareness.

During night operations, the FBO is still your best source of information. If no one is available, then carefully and safely announce your intentions.

- Before takeoff, taxi down the runway to try and scare any animals around the runway away.
- When landing, make a low fly-by down the runway. This will allow the pilot to see what may be on the runway and, hopefully, scare away any wildlife grazing along side the runway

Of course, the best advice is to be cautious. During migration seasons for our feathered friends, it is wise to be extra vigilant and cautious. The same applies for our four-legged deer friends, especially during the fall mating season.

For extra help, you can check out the FAA wildlife mitigation Web site http://wildlife-mitigation.tc.faa.gov/public_html/index.html. This Web site contains data and reports on wildlife strikes that date as far back as 1990. Another Web site that will be very helpful to you is the Avian Hazard Advisory System <http://www.usahas.com>. This Web site is a risk assessment tool that provides the user with a standardized measure of bird strike

risks for low-level routes.

The United States Bird Avoidance Model <http://www.usahas.com/bam> is the primary assessment tool for the U.S. Air Force. It is an historical archive for bird strike information.

The Notices to Airmen (NOTAM) is good way to see where bird strikes have occurred for that particular day as well as any flight restrictions. These can be found on the FAA Web site www.faa.gov. The information is available to help you navigate your way against bird strikes.

Although we can't always have the heroic Hollywood take-off, we can ensure a smooth and safe flight by being mindful and careful of the wildlife that surrounds us.

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