Grampaw Pettibone

From the Mailbag:

Dear Gramps,

Enclosed are some words recently issued by our command on the subject of bird strikes, which might provoke a thought or save others some grief. The following excerpt is provided:

"This is the second bird strike within three days, which causes us to re-evaluate our hazard assessment. This strike not only damaged the radome, but also fodded the engine. To CinCBird: I GIVE UP! I now fully realize that the airspace in "birdland" is a "flaktrap." Accordingly, this squadron will honor the DMZ erected at longitude 7730W, oriented N/S, east of that line from Norfolk, Va., to Wilmington, N.C. We must train for the possibility of combat in the sophisticated threat, but we cannot damage aircraft at the rate that we are with bird strikes, while flying at minimum altitudes of 500 to 100 feet. We will no longer penetrate that airspace below 1,000 feet, except while on target."

The message went on to request the following questions be answered in the interest of reducing bird str kes:

1. Does aircraft paint scheme make a difference?

2. Is the bird population increasing with more stringent environmental protection laws?

3. Are low-level routes out of the question (strictly for the birds?) – particularly in the swampy flatlands of the entire eastern shore coast?

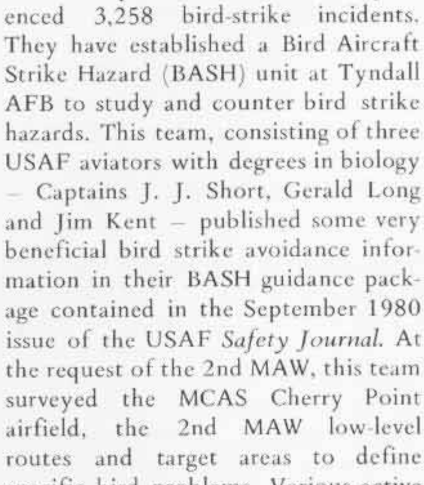
4. Is there sufficient knowledge of migrating habits and population to make sound judgments in reference to

low-level routes?

5. Have any measures been taken to readjust/relocate low-level routes away from high-density bird areas?

The Naval Safety Center receives approximately 200 reports of Navy aircraft bird strikes annually. In 1979, 100 plus incidents occurred, resulting in no injury/no damage, plus 60 Charlie incidents, six Bravo, and one Alpha damage incidents. During 1980, 125 no injury/no damage incidents were reported, with 67 Charlie, seven Bravo, and two Alpha damage incidents reported, some of which resulted in fatalities. Eighty-five percent of the incidents occurred at altitudes less than 1,000 feet above ground. Interestingly, one strike occurred at 15,000 feet.

Naval Aviation is not alone in this dilemma as our USAF counterparts also recognize bird strikes as a serious problem. During the period from April 1978 to April 1980, the USAF experienced 3,258 bird-strike incidents. They have established a Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) unit at Tyndall AFB to study and counter bird strike hazards. This team, consisting of three USAF aviators with degrees in biology – Captains J. J. Short, Gerald Long and Jim Kent – published some very beneficial bird strike avoidance information in their BASH guidance package contained in the September 1980 issue of the USAF *Safety Journal*. At the request of the 2nd MAW, this team surveyed the MCAS Cherry Point airfield, the 2nd MAW low-level routes and target areas to define specific bird problems. Various active and passive techniques for bird traffic control were recommended. For example, seagulls will not loiter in grassy areas adjacent to runways if



the grass length is kept at 6 to 12 inches vice cut short.

Effective bird control techniques for airfield facilities are fairly well defined. However, much remains to be accomplished in developing bird

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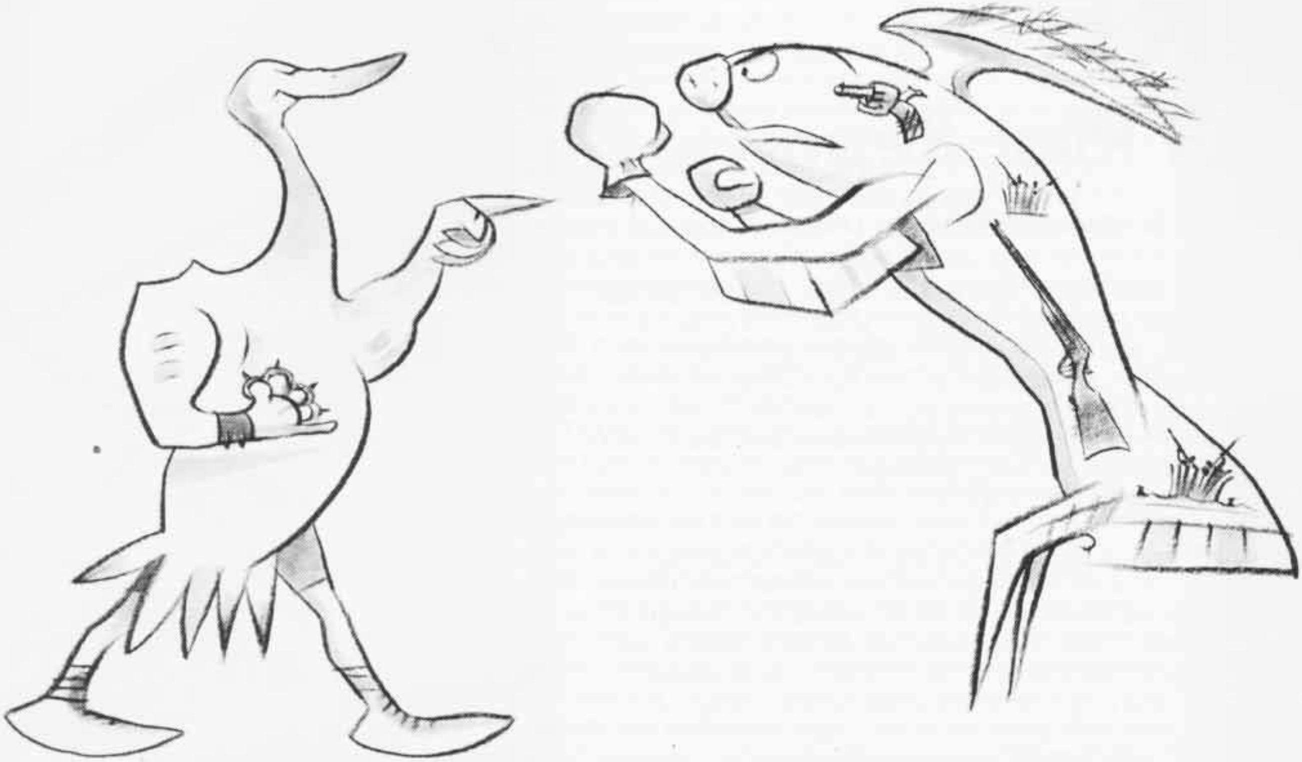

dispersal techniques for low-level training routes. This problem obviously requires more attention, and close cooperation of all services seems prudent.

For additional information on bird strike prevention programs, please contact the USAF BASH team at autovon 970-6239/40, Tyndall AFB, Fla.

Flock Foils Flight

One late February morning, the crew of a West Coast UH-1 *Huey* helo encountered instrument flight conditions at 200 feet after liftoff on a SAR training mission. Passing through 550 feet above ground level, the aircraft collided with a flock of northbound snow geese. One goose impacted and shattered the righthand forward windscreen.

The pilot squawked an emergency, as did the geese. He was given an immediate precision radar approach back to home plate. Rapidly deteriorating weather conditions prevented visual contact during descent to minimum altitude, and a missed approach was executed. The HAC elected to climb to VFR-condition-on-top and then proceeded to a safe landing in a known clear area 25 miles to the west.

After the weather improved, a maintenance crew was flown in to inspect and repair the aircraft. Damage was limited to the shattered right windscreen and scraped rotor blades. The starboard elevator and engine intake areas were covered with feathered debris but received no damage. The engines were not fodded.

The geese, however, did not fare so well. Approach radar was unable to detect their ruffled feathers on their snow-cluttered radar, forcing the geese to execute immediate terminal approaches. Six of the flock were recovered from the runway by the field support/salvage personnel.

Four of the geese incurred Alpha damage (dead ducks) and were properly disposed of by the crash-salvage crew. Two suffered only Bravo injury (broken wing spans) and were treated by a veterinarian – no quack cracks allowed. They were then assigned, TDY-DIFDEN status, to the care of a local biologist for eventual release, well free from the clutches of Colonel Sanders, Frank Perdue and other "finger-licking-good" enterprises.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Holy hidden hazards! This honker-vs-helo happening is a good example of why only birds of the same feather should flock together.

This crew was lucky that fate plucked their bird from the role of cooked goose. They could easily have been included on this menu of pea soup, goose under glass and marinated birdmen. Further, they were wise old owls in that they had their helmet visors down, as prescribed in the blue-bound-book (NATOPS) and thus prevented possible eye injury from flying glass and debris. In fact, they suffered no injuries, save a near fatal case of goose bumps.

An age-old Grampsism is that "a gaggle of geese in the goo is guaranteed to give any good birdman a down-in-the-mouth feeling should guts, fur and feathers engage the rotors."