

Bird Avoidance Program at Eielson Air Force Base, AK

There are eight to ten birdstrikes each year at Eielson, which is very low compared to other bases. Most of the strikes occur in the traffic pattern and involve small birds such as mews, gulls and cliff swallows. Geese have only accounted for a small percentage of bird strikes.

The low number of bird strikes is a direct result of our bird avoidance program. Our program limits bird strikes through two methods: habitat management and pilot awareness.

The most effective method of reducing bird strikes is habitat management. Much of the bird population that comes to Eielson is the result of regular migrations in the Spring and Fall. Many birds are attracted to the short grasses and bare areas around the runway. By managing the vegetation around the airfield, migratory birds will chose another place to land, an area that won't affect flying operations.

We do this by letting the grass in the runway infield grow long. Second, bare areas around the airfield are re-seeded with tall grasses to create a homogenous foliage environment with high and low spots. And third, base engineers are filling three man-made water holes that attract birds close to the runway.

The second method of reducing bird strikes is pilot awareness of bird concentrations. When bird activity becomes high enough to warrant caution, airfield and safety people declare one of three bird conditions: low, moderate or severe. The conditions restrict the types of landing approaches and warn pilots of bird activity.

A study of birdstrikes at Eielson over the last four years concludes our pro-active methods are working. Large migrations of birds pass Eielson from April 15-May 10 and Aug. 20-Oct. 10. Despite increased bird concentrations during these migrations, there was no increase in bird strikes. An Air Force bird strike avoidance team rated the Eielson program "very good" and gave us recommendations that we have already implemented to make it better.

The Eielson bird avoidance program is proven effective. But this does not mean there is no threat of future airstrikes. Pilots must always be aware of the threat of strikes, and base safety officials must be ready to look at other methods of bird avoidance. These methods include noise making devices, reflective tape and, as a last resort, lethal bird control.

At Eielson our primary concern is for the safety and well being of our people, the community, the environment and our aircraft. Through continued proactive birdstrike avoidance we will always work to improve safety.

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