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Airport Wildlife Hazards

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Wildlife Services (WS) provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts that threaten public health and safety. We partner with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Department of Defense, airports, and the aviation industry to provide scientific expertise and operational assistance to reduce the safety hazards and economic impacts to aviation caused by birds, mammals, and other wildlife.

About Airport Wildlife Hazards

Airport Wildlife Hazards FAQs
Airport Hazard Research
Protecting the Flying Public (FY20)
Safer Skies: For Birds and People
Strike One – You're Out
Expand All

What is a Wildlife Strike?

Wildlife strikes are when birds or other animals collide with an airplane. This may occur when the airplane is taking off, landing, or while it is in the air. Wildlife strikes have increased in the past 30 years because both populations of many hazardous wildlife species and numbers of aircraft movements are increasing (Dolbeer and Eschenfelder 2003). For example, 13 of the 14 largest (>8 lbs) bird species in North America have shown significant population increases in the past 30 years. These species include Canada geese, white and brown pelicans, sandhill cranes, wild turkeys, and bald eagles.

What is “snarge”?

Snarge is the biological remains left on a plane after a wildlife strike. If snarge is collected and sent to the Smithsonian Institute's Feather Identification Lab, feather fragments can be used to identify the species involved in some wildlife strikes. For strikes without significant feather fragment material, DNA can be extracted from the blood and tissue samples to positively identify the animal involved.

Wildlife Strike Database - Wildlife Services, through an interagency agreement with the Federal Aviation Administration, has managed the National Wildlife Strike Database (NWSD) from 1990 to the present. The NWSD contains over 210,000 records of strike reports between civil aircraft and wildlife in the USA, including about 14,400 reports in 2017.

In addition, more than 4,000 strikes were reported by the U.S. Air Force in 2017.

Wildlife collisions with aircraft cost U.S. civil and military aviation approximately $1 billion annually and pose a serious safety hazard.

- "Bird Strikes: How to Collect, Ship Remains, and Have Bird Remains Identified" (YouTube Video)
- "Feather Identification: When Birds Collide" (YouTube Video)
- Smithsonian Institute's Feather Identification Lab
- FAA Wildlife Strike Database

Wildlife Hazard Management at Airports

This Program Data Report has been developed to provide the public with information about WS' wildlife damage management activities at airports. WS takes pride in its partnerships and cooperation with resource owners in developing and implementing sound, science-based projects designed to reduce conflicts between humans and wildlife.

- USDA Working to Prevent Bird-Plane Collisions (YouTube Video)
- Airports Assisted by Wildlife Services — FY17
- Program Data Reports — View by Airport Type and State

Statistics by State

Managing bird and other wildlife hazards at airports is a complex, public-sensitive endeavor involving many species of wildlife governed by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and other Federal, State and local regulations.

Because of the complexity and sensitivity, airports are encouraged to employ professional biologists trained in wildlife hazard management at airports (14 CFR Part 139.337 and FAA Advisory Circular 150/5200-36a [FAA 2012]). They assess hazards, provide training, and to assist in the development, implementation, and evaluation of wildlife hazard management plans. Professionally developed and implemented management plans minimize the likelihood of catastrophic or major-damage wildlife strikes on an airport and provide crucial support during litigation in the aftermath of any significant strike event that might occur. WS assists airfields in all 50 states, 3 territories and 9 foreign countries.

View Program Data Report E to filter by airport type and State.

Partners

In recognition of WS’ expertise and accountability, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with WS,

which encourages airports to “request technical and operational assistance from WS to reduce wildlife hazards.” The Department of Defense executed a similar MOU to address wildlife conflicts at military installations. In 2013, a MOU between WS, the National Association of State Aviation Officials (NASAO) and the FAA was signed, fostering cooperation between the signatory parties to reduce wildlife hazards at airports in every state.

- Federal Aviation Administration
- Bird Strike Committee USA
- U.S. Air Force
- National Association of State Aviation Officials
    - APHIS/WS & NASAO MOU (2006)
    - MOU between NASAO, FAA and USDA (2003)

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