



The BASH at NAS Whidbey

By JO2 Joaquin Juatai

NAS Whidbey Island serves as the proving ground for many of the initiatives promoted by the Navy's BASH program. The BASH program manager, Matthew Klope, is located here and has helped institute many of NASWI's BASH procedures. The base is located in an area of abundant wildlife, which also means wildlife strikes are an issue. The surrounding area is a haven for shorebirds, raptors, herons, deer, coyotes, and other wildlife. Each of these animals plays a part in airfield operations. The flight routes routinely used by Whidbey's aircraft allow wildlife to become a factor in flight operations planning. Here are some of the ways NAS Whidbey Island minimizes the risk of a wildlife strike:

☛ **On the airfield:**

1. NASWI's BASH program began with the removal of perches from the airfield. Derelict equipment, unnecessary gear, and everything that could be perched on was removed from flight areas.

2. Anything that couldn't be removed was covered with spikes, wire octopuses, and other perch-detering devices. "If it doesn't move, it has spikes," said Klope.

3. Trees and shrubs used by wildlife to perch on or hide in are being removed.

4. NAS Field Facilities operates a Bird Deterrent Dispersal Team, known as the BASH team. This team responds to wildlife-problem situations on the airfield. They are trained in using pyrotechnics and have authorization to fire live rounds. The authorization that allows the shooting of problem wildlife is from the base CO, under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Depredation Permit. The BASH team is notified whenever there is the possibility wildlife could impede safe-flight operations.

5. Random deterrent devices, such as noisy propane cannons, are used.

☛ **In the area surrounding the airfield:**

1. Hangars are a prime place for a bird to perch and nest. Whidbey's BASH program participates in ongoing studies to deter nesting birds from flight-line facilities.

2. A BASH orientation is part of the airfield driving-indoctrination brief for everyone working on the airfield. Wing and squadron safety stand-downs include BASH training. BASH is promoted at every level as everyone's responsibility; it's not just the pilots' or the facilities crews' responsibility.

3. All hands are actively encouraged to participate. "If you see a problem on the airfield, such as a flock of ducks, call the tower. If you find a dead bird on the apron, pick it up and report it. The retrieval of a dead bird has led to the discovery of aircraft damage in the past," said Klope. "If you see it, report it," is the phrase of the day, he added.

Never hesitate to report a strike, a find, or the possibility wildlife might interfere with flight operations.

4. BASH program updates are presented monthly at the base aviation-safety-council meetings. Current wildlife trends are discussed, past wildlife trends are reviewed, and BASH warnings are issued, based on those trends. If shorebirds tend to be a recurring problem in January, then the BASH team will brief the council of the high bird-strike probability for that period. BASH personnel would outline their abatement plans accordingly.

☛ **Administratively:**

1. NAS Whidbey Island's commanding officer signed a BASH instruction, detailing the NASWI plan. This plan includes a standard-operating procedure for the use of pyrotechnics and live ammo.

2. NASWI and its tenant commands are encouraged to keep detailed strike records using the Safety Center's database. The BASH team can use these records to determine what species are a recurring problem and take steps

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to remove or eliminate them. As Klope put it, “Why waste time on birds that aren’t a problem?”

Research:

1. “We are taking data from BIRDRAD, a bird-tracking radar, and posting warnings to the pilots,” said Klope. BIRDRAD enables the Whidbey BASH team to make flight-operation recommendations, based on trends shown by radar images of bird activity at the airfield.

2. Reporting strikes and keeping detailed records are essential. Using the data collected from wildlife-strike reports, BASH personnel can analyze trends and predict wildlife activity. Detailed records have shown the tendency of recently fledged red-tailed hawks to stray into the flight path in the late spring—a recurring problem.

With the data provided by strike records, we can predict problem areas and take action to relocate or eliminate problem species.

The bottom line is if you are not proactive in your approach to BASH, you are not effective in abating wildlife-strike hazards. BASH always should be in the thoughts of every individual on the airfield and the surrounding area. Never hesitate to report a strike, a find, or the possibility wildlife might interfere with flight operations. The lives of the pilots and aircrew working on the airfield are at stake. NAS Whidbey Island’s BASH program is striving to create an environment friendly to wildlife and flight operations, and it is an all-hands effort. 

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Birdstrikes can occur anywhere. The griffin vulture in these two photos was struck by a VQ-2 aircraft in Rota, Spain.