

Prepared Testimony of
John E. Ostrom

CHAIRMAN, BIRD STRIKE COMMITTEE – USA



Before the Subcommittee on Aviation
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
February 24, 2009

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Chairman Costello, Ranking Member Petri and members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation, thank you for inviting me to participate in this hearing. My name is John Ostrom and I am Manager of Airside Operations for Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

I am also proud to serve as the Chairman of Bird Strike Committee USA, and am testifying today on behalf of this organization. Bird Strike Committee USA was established in 1991 as an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to providing leadership to the aviation wildlife hazard management community. Our focus is on the exchange of information, training, and education, and the promotion of research and development to reduce the threat of wildlife hazards to aircraft operations.

Bird Strike Committee USA is directed by a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the Department of Defense, the Federal Aviation Administration, the United States Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services, the aviation industry and U.S. airports.

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From the dawn of aviation to the present day, wildlife has posed a significant threat to aircraft and to the passengers they carry. However, the threat has significantly increased in recent years as a result of highly successful environmental programs during the past 40 years that have resulted in dramatic increases in populations of many bird species in North America that are hazardous to aircraft. For example, 24 of the 36 largest (>4 lb) bird species in North America have shown significant population increases in the past 30 years and only 3 species have shown declines. The non-migratory population of Canada geese (8-12 lbs) has quadrupled from 1.0 million to 3.9 million birds in the USA, 1990-2008. Over the past eighteen years, our organization and its members have worked diligently to bring awareness of this increasing problem to the forefront of the aviation industry. We have made significant progress but have much still to do to realize our vision fully.

On August 22, 2007, then Chairman of Bird Strike Committee USA Dr. Richard Dolbeer sent a letter to Vice Chairman Robert Sumwalt of the National Transportation Safety Board. In it Dr. Dolbeer expressed grave concerns regarding continuing hazards to aviation from conflicts with wildlife, especially birds. We asked for a further review of National Transportation Safety Recommendations A-99-86 through -94 (19 Nov 1999). In the letter, we identified five significant strike events that occurred between September 2005 and June 2007 that were at least as serious as those encounters which triggered the Board's Recommendations in 1999.

We also acknowledged the work done by the Federal Aviation Administration to improve wildlife control at airports by the then recent update of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 139, which included increased guidance on how airport operators must mitigate wildlife hazards.

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Some of our specific concerns then and now are that there has never been a joint industry/government body established to address or even define the issue. There is no recognized metric or standard to judge whether conditions are improving or worsening, and there is no comprehensive industry/government plan to address the hazard to aircraft and human life.

In 2008, Bird Strike Committee USA reorganized to better address the changing needs of the aviation safety and wildlife management industries. As part of that effort, we identified the following seven goals:

1. Establish and facilitate additional forums for exchanging knowledge and information regarding the nature and management of wildlife hazards to aviation and best practices and innovative technologies in the aviation and wildlife management industries.

Currently, Bird Strike Committees USA and Canada sponsor a joint annual meeting which is attended by both aviation and wildlife management professionals. Aviation and wildlife conflicts are a global problem, and we are working with our international partners, the International Bird Strike Committee (IBSC), on the possibility of future collaborative initiatives. In addition to our annual meetings and working with IBSC, we want to organize regional aviation wildlife hazard workshops for airports and flying communities around the country. The purpose of these workshops will be to establish a grass roots education and awareness initiative on the hazards of wildlife to aviation and measures that can be taken to mitigate them.

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2. Serve as the liaison to national and international Bird Strike Committees and to other professional aviation and wildlife organizations. In this capacity we will provide timely and informed advice on aviation wildlife hazard management issues to governmental agencies, decision makers and others who are responsible for the nation's air transportation system.

Bird Strike Committee USA is working with the Federal Aviation Administration to establish a formal relationship which identifies Bird Strike Committee USA as the national committee for aviation wildlife hazard issues in the context of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Airport Services Manual, Part 3 - Bird Control and Reduction. That document states:

“2.1 When a wildlife hazard problem is known to exist at airports within a State, Annex 14, Volume I requires that a national committee be formed. Such committees have proven to be popular venues to gain and exchange information on research and developments in airport wildlife control. Although the composition of a national committee may vary from State to State, it should include all of the stakeholders associated with or interested in the problem. It should be noted that national committees have very little authority in decision-making and usually act as an information source for those in the aviation community.

2.2 A national committee should include governmental departments such as transport defense, agriculture and environment as well as representatives from the

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major aircraft operators and airports, pilot's associations and airframe and engine manufacturers.”

3. Conduct and promote communications efforts to enhance the awareness of wildlife hazards to aviation and efforts to reduce that threat.

It is our intention to ensure that everyone involved in or affected by aviation-wildlife conflicts are fully cognizant of the issues as well as the tools and procedures needed to mitigate threats. Working with governmental agencies and aviation industry organizations, we intend to develop an informational awareness campaign and communications plan for the aviation community through the use of promotional materials and aviation industry media outlets.

4. Contribute to the public's understanding of wildlife hazard management and its significance to the safety of air travel.

In the wake of the recent US Airways 1549 accident, it is even more critical that a safety and awareness campaign targeted to the general public be developed describing the positive work being done with the current airport wildlife management programs and their impact on safety of flight.

5. Promote professionalism in wildlife management programs on airports through professional development of individuals working in aviation wildlife hazard management.

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Managing our nation's wildlife resources at airports can be controversial, and it is our intent that persons performing this work be fully trained and knowledgeable of the tools available and of best practices. Bird Strike Committee USA is working to develop formal partnerships with industry organizations, academia and the private sector to create future training programs and ethical guidelines for personnel conducting wildlife hazard management activities on airports.

6. Promote the collection and analysis of accurate wildlife strike data for military and civil aviation in the USA as a foundation for a) understanding the nature of strike hazards, b) developing effective and appropriate management programs and c) evaluating the efficacy of management programs.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration, there were 82,057 strikes recorded in the FAA's National Wildlife Strike Database from 1990 through 1997. Analysis of strikes from U.S. airports and airlines indicated that less than twenty percent of all strikes were reported to the FAA. Bird Strike Committee USA supports more aggressive reporting of all wildlife strikes, up to and including making strike reporting mandatory. In addition to increased strike reporting, it is imperative that we develop some form of performance measurement indicators that clearly identify progress towards specific goals in reducing wildlife hazards to aviation. As a previous Steering Committee Member once said, "We can't achieve success if we don't know where we are going." Finally, we need to make all of the information in the FAA's National Wildlife Strike Database available to airports and industry professionals in order to foster increased collaboration amongst groups with similar problems to develop more effective management programs.

7. Anticipate future wildlife challenges to aviation and provide leadership in promoting education, research and development of effective methods for reducing wildlife hazards to aviation.

Today, there is no single “clearinghouse” where yesterday’s problems and tomorrow’s solutions for aviation/wildlife conflicts can be brought together. It is our goal that Bird Strike Committee USA provide the future forum for scientific discussions as well as operational testing and standards for measuring performance of tools and processes for an effective and comprehensive aviation wildlife management program.

In conclusion, significantly reducing the aircraft/wildlife threat will require a collaborative effort by all aviation stakeholders with a major investment in education and research and development.

Chairman Costello, Ranking Member Petri and members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation, I would like to thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify about the work being done by the volunteers of Bird Strike Committee USA to reduce the hazards to aviation posed by wildlife. We welcome the opportunity to continue working with you to ensure that our skies remain safe. Thank you.