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Whidbey Island Tests New Radar to Avoid Bird Strikes

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OAK HARBOR, Wash. (NNS) -- Naval Air Station Whidbey Island (NASWI) tested a new radar technology called eBird Rad to identify birds flying around the airfield, April 27-29.

“The radar is an available tool to reduce the risk of bird strikes and improve the safety of aircraft and personnel,” said Matt Klope, Navy’s bird aircraft strike hazard (BASH) coordinator. “The cutting-edge technology of the eBird Rad is amazing.”

The eBird Rad system provides a significant advancement in technology available for BASH management and for real-time detection and tracking of hazardous bird activity at military airfields.

During the test, the radar operator detects birds and radios that information to several teams of ground observers in order to validate the sightings.

“The focus of this program is to use small mobile marine radars to detect birds and gain knowledge about their movements,” said Mike Begier, wildlife biologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services Program (USDAWSP). “We are looking for any tool to prevent bird strikes.”

The radar has been tested at military airfields on board Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point and Naval Air Station, Patuxent River over the past month.

“The goal of NASWI is to have the best BASH program in the Navy,” said Bill MacMillan, NASWI airfield manager. “This technology is a great instrument to use in achieving that goal.”

The multiagency project includes members of the military, Marine and Navy BASH programs, USDAWSP, Federal Aviation Administration, academic community and civilians from the local area.

In the future, operations officers could use this technology to input bird sightings, strike events and migration patterns into their flight planning.

“The most obvious advantage of this technology is the ability of the radar to locate birds during all lighting conditions and most weather phenomena,” said Sid Majumdar, a research assistant from the University of Illinois.

"Any new technology that helps aviators avoid bird strikes is a positive development for our community," said Aviation Warfare Systems Operator Chief (AW/NAC) Daryl Hammerschmidt of Patrol Squadron 40.

According to the Naval Safety Center Web site, aviation-mishap reports show strike events have caused the death of two naval aviators, 14 crashed aircraft, 17 ejections, 36 injured aircrew members and 243 incidents of damaged engines.

DoD has reported 3,000 bird aircraft strikes in the last year. Each year, birds cause more than $600 million in damage to civilian and military aircraft, according to the FAA.

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