



AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

December 2023



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AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

UFOs – who knows what's out there...

No, not quite what you might be thinking, but Unknown Flying Objects, or to put it another way, known knowns or unknown unknowns?

We know that electronic planning aids can be useful and make pre-flight preparation and in-flight navigation much easier and, dare I say, quicker – but can we be sure that the electronic flight bag shows everything we need to know about? In fact, does a paper chart also show us everything, or are there some things that aren't immediately obvious to us when we refer to these aeronautical publications?

To illustrate this point, which I referred to in my [February 2023 Insight](#), I've chosen [Airprox 2023116](#) this month which involved a model jet aircraft and a Hawk. The model was being operated from a site where activity is authorised up to 1500ft, and is published in the UK AIP. The Hawk pilot was one of a formation of aircraft on a low-level transit as part of their task.

The model aircraft site did have a NOTAM warning of UAS swarm activity, and the

Hawk pilot called the phone number provided, only to be informed that the swarm activity wasn't taking place and to refer to a different NOTAM regarding general site activity – this second NOTAM had expired. Subsequently, the Hawk formation routed past the model aircraft site at an altitude of around 1300ft while the model jet was flying at around 1000ft. Fortunately, the approaching formation was spotted by an observer at the site and the model jet operator took avoiding action by rapidly descending the model; the Hawk pilots never saw it.

Here at the UKAB we don't often receive reports of Airprox involving models, so this was welcome because it identified a number of important points. First, the second model aircraft NOTAM was, essentially, a repeat of the information already published in the UK AIP and so, in accordance with the [UK NOTAM Guidance Material](#) paragraph

1.6(n) (which states that a NOTAM will not be issued for general reminders on already published information), the NOTAM was not renewed on expiry.

Many of us involved in aviation are frustrated by the proliferation of NOTAMs that add little in terms of useful information, so it is absolutely right that the UK NOTAM Office doesn't add to this by issuing NOTAMs describing the same information that is already published elsewhere. However (and it is a big however), not everything that is published in the UK AIP is reproduced on the military and CAA VFR charts. To do so would introduce a level of clutter that would make the charts unusable, but that does leave us in a position where we might not be aware that something is published in the UK AIP because there is nothing on the VFR chart to indicate that a site is present; this is the case for model aircraft sites that operate above 400ft agl.

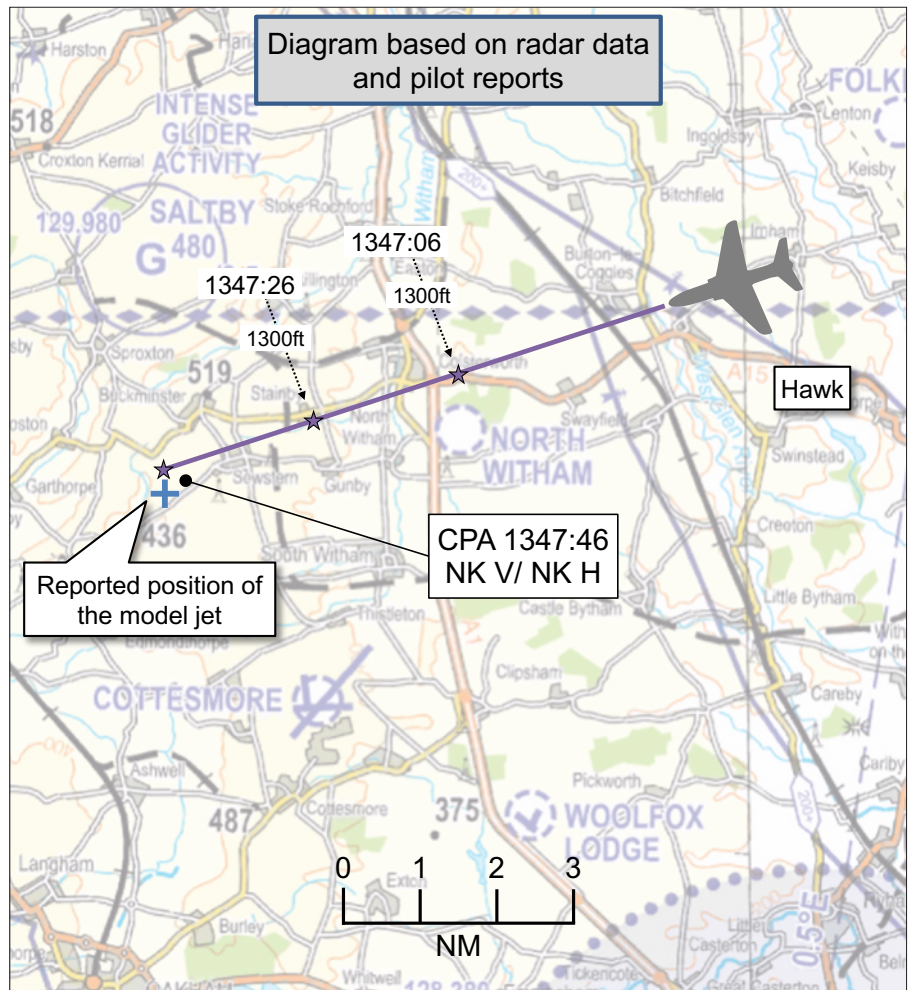
Secondly, during the investigation into this particular Airprox, it was discovered that there are a number of model aircraft sites (23 in fact) where model aircraft up to a mass of 25kg can operate above 400ft agl. While these are published in the UK AIP, none are marked on VFR charts and there is no mention of the size of model aircraft that can be encountered. In addition, and more worryingly, there are also other sites where the Large Model Association (LMA) can operate model aircraft with a mass up to 150kg (yes, 150kg!) – not all of these are listed in the UK AIP and, again, none are marked on the military or CAA VFR charts.

I'm sure you'll agree that encountering a 150kg object in-flight presents a potential risk that would be useful to know about. The British Model Flying Association (BMFA) is well aware of this and has requested NOTAMs to be issued to alert other air users of these sites. However, and as I have already mentioned above, because this information is already published in the UK AIP (well, some of it at least) then the request for a NOTAM is often refused (in accordance with the UK NOTAM Guidance Material).

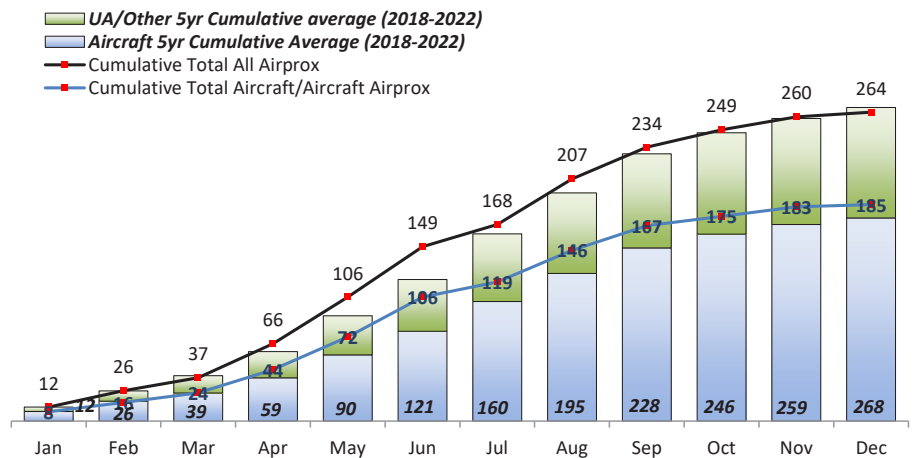
So, what's the answer? Well, the Board felt that it's unreasonable to expect all pilots to know the entire contents of the UK AIP and so made recommendations to the LMA to publish – in the UK AIP – all their sites where models weighing up to 150kg can operate above 400ft agl, and to Defence to consider marking these sites on military VFR charts and on radar overlays for controllers. Although the Airprox involved a model jet and a military aircraft, it could easily have involved a crewed aircraft from any other sector. It might be worth checking whether these model aircraft sites pop up on your electronic planning aid and/or the software that you use for in-flight navigation.

UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

This month the Board evaluated 24 Airprox, including ten UA/Other events, eight of which were reported by the piloted aircraft and two by the drone/model aircraft operator. Of the 16 full evaluations, four were classified as risk-bearing – one as category A and three as category B. The Board made five Safety Recommendations this month; three were related to the Airprox of the month as already described above. The other two were related to **Airprox 2023124**, where a glider from Challock and a DA42 joining the Instrument



2023 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution



Approach Procedure for Lydd came quite close to each other – this was the third such encounter that the Board has seen in as many years, so it recommended that Lydd and Challock establish a Letter of Agreement and that Lydd considers marking Challock on their Instrument Approach Charts.

Finally, I have included the usual graphic that shows reporting levels over the year. At the time of writing, there were still a couple

of weeks to go before the end of 2023 but, given the weather we all experienced in early December, I don't anticipate many more Airprox reports before the end of the year. I hope 2024 brings you better weather and happy landings.

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