



AIRPROX *Insight*

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE

April 2024



Photo for illustrative purposes - Focus 365 Photography

AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Feathers – not just for the birds...

...and well worth giving a wide berth to

In my [March Airprox Insight](#) I talked about planning considerations that can help us all reduce the likelihood of having an Airprox. Among those thoughts was the choice of cruising altitude, and I suggested a 'random number' might not be a bad idea. Continuing in that vein, this month I want to talk about operating near airfields with instrument approaches in Class G airspace. While there are a large number of aerodromes around the UK – some with an ATZ and many without – I want to talk here about those with an ATZ *and* instrument approaches outside controlled airspace.

To help illustrate this I've chosen **Airprox 2023187** which involved an LS1 glider and a DA42 about four miles north of Cranfield. The glider pilot was heading in a westerly direction while following a 'cloud street' where thermals line up and produce an energy line. Meanwhile, the DA42 pilot, in receipt of a Procedural Service from Cranfield Approach, was approaching the CIT NDB to enter the hold from the west while conducting instrument flying (IF) training (under IFR).

The lowest published holding altitude for the instrument procedures at Cranfield is 3500ft, and the DA42 pilot was at that altitude. The glider pilot was flying in the opposite direction at a recorded altitude of about 3750ft and, although not in communication with anyone, was listening-out on a common glider frequency. The glider was equipped with FLARM for electronic conspicuity, but there was nothing compatible on the DA42 that could receive its position and height signal.

So, with the Cranfield controller being unaware that the glider was in the vicinity, and there being no EC interactions between the aircraft, neither pilot was aware of the other until a visual sighting — they passed within 0.2nm and 270ft of each other in opposite directions.

On a CAA VFR chart, an aerodrome with instrument approach procedures outside controlled airspace is marked with 'feathers' along the main instrument runway. That does not mean that procedures only exist to that runway, but indicates that there is at least one instrument approach

procedure to that aerodrome. There is also a note on those charts stating that 'Pilots are strongly recommended to contact aerodrome ATSU before flying within 10nm of any aerodrome marked with instrument approach feathers.'

But, because these airfields will have a qualified air traffic controller to administer the procedures, only a pilot who holds a Flight Radiotelephony Operator's Licence (FRTOL) is qualified and *permitted* to speak to them. Glider pilots aren't required to hold a FRTOL and so it is no surprise that many do not communicate with air traffic control.

The British Gliding Association (BGA) is doing some sterling work to encourage glider pilots to gain a FRTOL, but that doesn't change the fact that there is no requirement for them to hold one. Therefore, pilots of powered aircraft flying in the vicinity of airfields and communicating with ATC shouldn't expect to hear glider pilots on the same frequency.

Of course, there's no formal requirement to contact ATC unless a pilot wishes to ask for a service, but it's always a good idea to

at least let controllers and/or FISOs know that we are there and what our intentions are. If we don't want to speak on the radio, or are not qualified to do so, we can help ourselves before flight by looking around the intended route for these 'feathers' and then taking a look at the approach charts for those airfields to at least get a feel for the kind of altitudes at which we would expect other aircraft to be flying.

In this case the glider pilot was only slightly above the published hold altitude and so had increased their chances of encountering an aircraft on an instrument procedure.

Cranfield has become particularly busy in recent months with exactly this kind of instrument training, so if you fly around that area regularly it might be worth having a look at the instrument approach procedures and perhaps noting down a couple of altitudes to avoid (this is also true of any other airfield similarly marked, such as Cambridge, Exeter, Blackpool, Humberside etc).

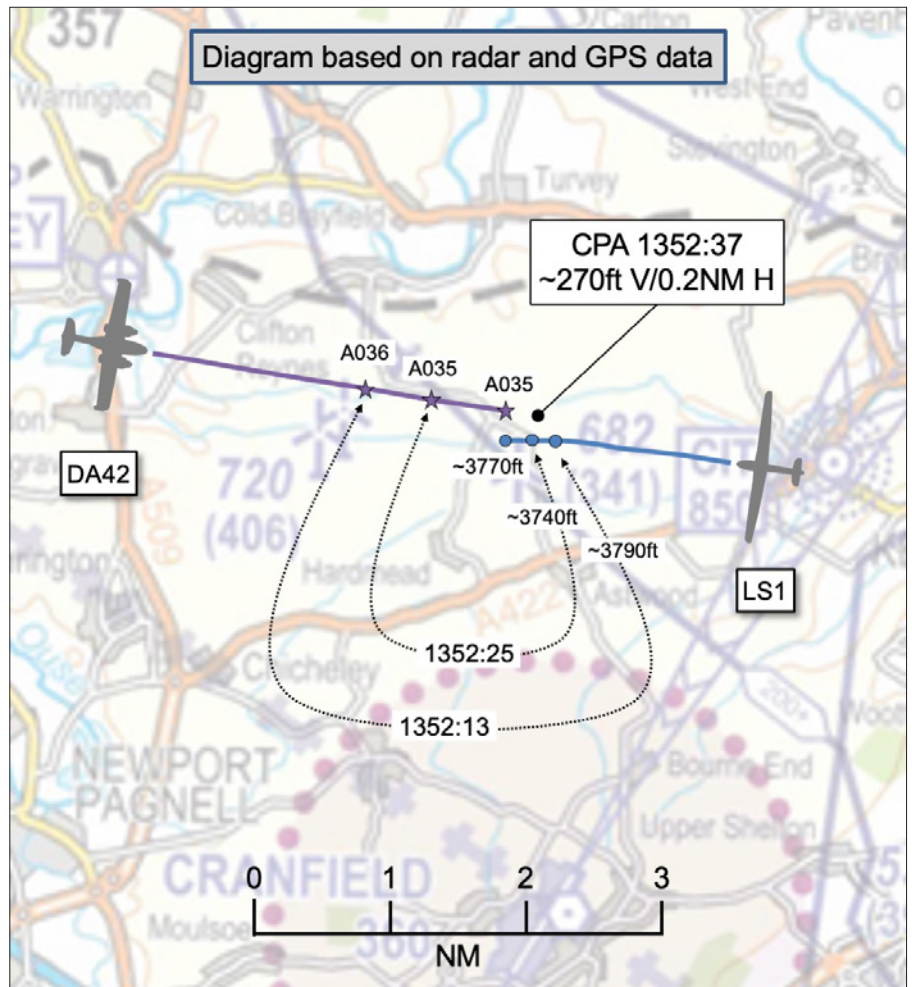
Finally, it's also worth noting that it is extremely difficult for a glider pilot to predict their exact track as they will be looking for lift as they fly and following the energy (areas most likely to provide lift). Therefore, we should all be extra-vigilant in areas where we believe this energy may be available, such as under cumulus clouds, because pilots of gliders, paragliders and paramotors might all be looking to exploit that energy to gain height.

UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

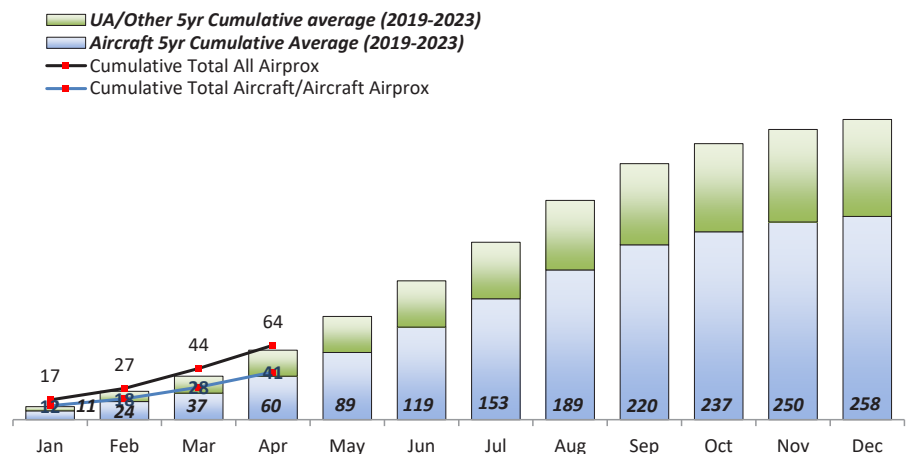
This month the Board evaluated 27 Airprox, including nine UA/Other events, eight of which were reported by the piloted aircraft and one by the drone operator. Of the 19 full evaluations, eight were classified as risk-bearing – four as Category A and four as Category B.

The Board also made two Safety Recommendations this month. Firstly, that the BHPA reviews training material with a view to including a structured lookout scan technique. This Recommendation arose during the Board's discussion of **Airprox 2023183** where it came to light (from the BHPA Board member) that a structured lookout scan for pilots does not feature in the BHPA training syllabus.

The second Recommendation followed the assessment of **Airprox 2023211** where two aircraft flew into proximity in the Liverpool CTR. The Recommendation is for Liverpool and Hawarden to review their



2024 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution



LoA with a view to affording additional consideration for pilots operating under VFR and conducting Instrument Approaches to Hawarden, while also considering the application of a vertical separation buffer between Liverpool and Hawarden traffic.

Despite the poor weather in the early part of this year, and as the graphic shows, Airprox reporting has been slightly higher so far in 2024 than we would have expected. I hope that this is not a signal for a bumper year of Airprox!

As the summer approaches, and we all look to do more flying than we have in recent months, I encourage you to take a look back at a few Insight articles and ask yourself if there is anything else you can do to minimise the likelihood of your having an Airprox.

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