

AIRPROX REPORT No 2014182

Date/Time: 21 Sep 2014 1515Z (Sunday)

Position: 5112N 00049E
(Challock Airfield)

Airspace: Lon FIR (Class: G)

Aircraft 1 **Aircraft 2**

Type: Slingsby C172
Skylark4

Operator: Civ Pte Civ Pte

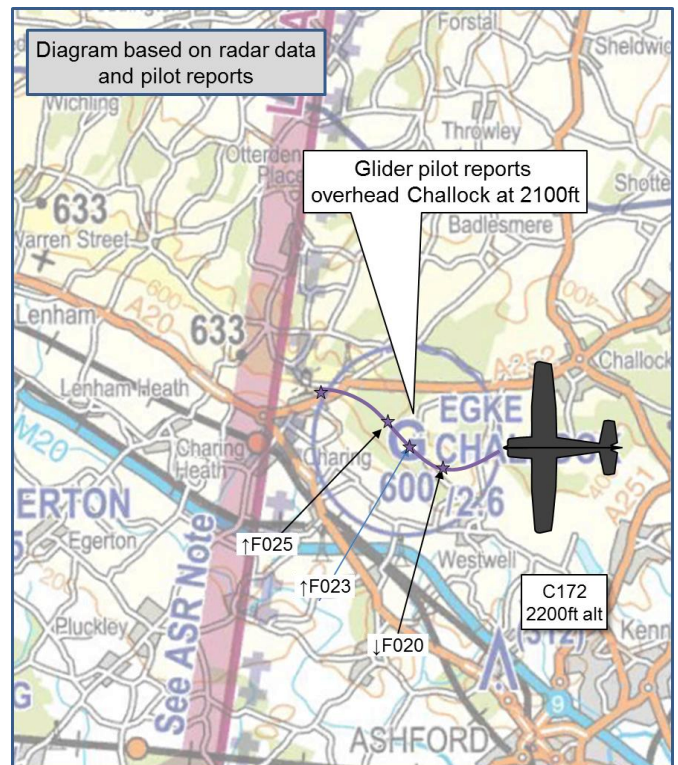
Alt/FL: 2100ft 2200ft
QNH QNH

Conditions: VMC VMC

Visibility: 6km >10km

Reported Separation:
0ft V/50m H 200ft V/1nm H

Recorded Separation: NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE SKYLARK PILOT reports flying a white glider without lights or a transponder. The aircraft was not fitted with FLARM. He was flying at 2100ft overhead Challock airfield at a speed of 40kts with 4 other gliders all 50-150 ft below him. He stated that there was a high degree of thermal conditions. He first noticed the other aircraft in his 2 o'clock position about 300ft above him. He reported that the aircraft then 'dived down' to his altitude and flew past fast and within 50m horizontally. He didn't take avoiding action as he wanted to keep the other aircraft in sight. Once it had passed it pulled up to the right, flew a 360° turn, and set course to the west. The pilot stated that in his opinion this was a deliberately spiteful manoeuvre and, had he had to change his aircraft's attitude, the other aircraft could have easily hit him; furthermore, he opined that to fly so low over an active gliding club was a poor decision that compromised his safety.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

THE C172 PILOT reports flying a white aircraft with all lights illuminated and transponder selected with Modes 3A,C and S. The aircraft was fitted with TCAS I. He recalled that he was flying a route around north Kent and that the wind-speed and direction took him further south than he intended. He first saw three gliders approximately a mile away, and they appeared to be climbing, so he turned right and headed north for a while to keep clear. He commented that, had the gliders been transponding, his TCAS would have given him an earlier indication, well before he became visual. On landing at his destination he telephoned the gliding club and apologised for his routing, he was thanked for the call, and told that it was no problem and no pilots had made any mention of it.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'None'.

Factual Background

The weather at Lydd was reported as:

METAR EGMD 211250Z 01017KT 9999 FEW034 19/12 Q1023

Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

The C172 and glider pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to fly into such proximity as to create a danger of collision¹. If the incident geometry is considered to be converging, then the C172 pilot was required to give way to the gliders².

Comments

BGA

See-and-avoid again played a major part in this Airprox; as did routing overhead an active gliding site (at around the height of a winch or aerotow launch). Thanks to the Cessna pilot for contacting the gliding club afterwards. However, if you are near a gliding site and see gliders, you may not have seen them all. In good thermic conditions, rates of climb of 500-1000fpm are possible, even in the UK.

Summary

An Airprox was reported on 21st September 2014 between a Skylark glider thermalling above Challock at 2100ft, and a C172 at 2200ft. Neither aircraft was receiving an ATS, and the incident does not show on radar, so the exact separation is not known.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from the pilots of both aircraft and radar photographs/video recordings.

The Board was informed that there had been a discrepancy in the timings of the pilots' reports and so they spent some time reconciling the differences in the descriptions of the event verses what was evident from the radar recording. Specifically, there had been no radar recording of any aircraft flying a 360° turn overhead Challock, or of an aircraft diving down at the time reported, or an hour either side of that time. In the end, the Board agreed that the C172 had probably been the aircraft involved in the Airprox given that the pilot had been frank and open in his admission of doing so, but that his descent and turn over Challock, together with the glider pilot's own thermalling turns, had probably given the illusion of a more drastic manoeuvre. For his part, although the glider pilot was mistaken in his perception of the C172's track, it was clear to the Board that he had visual contact with it throughout and, despite its proximity, was content that he didn't need to take avoiding action.

In looking at the actions of the C172 pilot, the Board noted that he was on a cross-country flight and had acknowledged that, although unintentional, he had flown through the active gliding site and into proximity with the gliders. The C172 pilot reported seeing three gliders, where in fact there were at least 5 according to the glider pilot. This led the Board to believe that the C172 pilot had probably not seen the glider involved in the Airprox, which explained his different perception of the risk. The C172 pilot had stated that it had been the wind speed and direction that had caused him to fly off course; the Board opined that he would have been well-served to have checked met forecasts prior to getting airborne to avoid this type of navigational error.

In the end, the Board decided that the cause of the Airprox was a probable non-sighting by the C172 pilot, with a contributory factor that he had flown through an active and promulgated glider site. In assessing the risk, the Board noted that the glider pilot had the C172 visual at all times and had not needed to take avoiding action; therefore, they determined the risk to be Category C.

¹ Rules of the Air 2007 (as amended), Rule 8 (Avoiding aerial collisions).

² *ibid.*, Rule 9 (Converging).

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A probable non-sighting by the C172 pilot.

Contributory Factor: The C172 pilot flew through a promulgated and active glider site.

Degree of Risk: C.

ERC Score³: 4.

³ Although the Event Risk Classification (ERC) trial had been formally terminated for future development at the time of the Board, for data continuity and consistency purposes, Director UKAB and the UKAB Secretariat provided a shadow assessment of ERC.