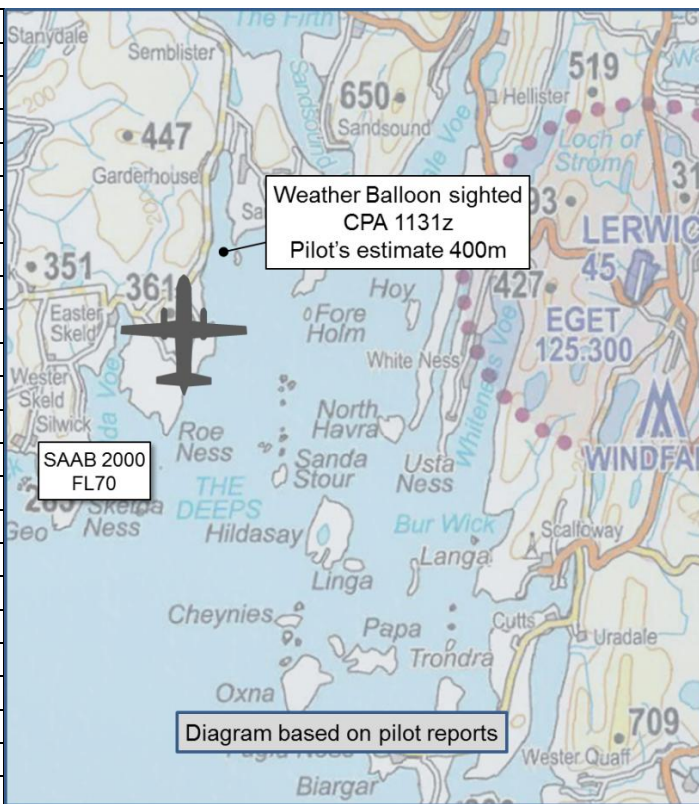


AIRPROX REPORT No 2015005

Date: 21 Jan 2015 Time: 1131Z Position: 6011N 00114W Location: 5nm W Lerwick

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	SAAB 2000	Met Balloon
Operator	CAT	Met Office
Airspace	Scottish FIR	Scottish FIR
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	
Service	Deconfliction	
Provider	Scatsta	
Altitude/FL	FL70	
ACAS/TAS	TCAS II	
Alert	N/A	
Transponder	A,C,S	
Reported		
Colours	White & Blue	Beige/White
Lighting	HISLs, Strobes	
Conditions	VMC	
Visibility	10K	
Altitude/FL	FL70	
Altimeter	QNH(1013hPa)	
Heading	360°	
Speed	240kt	
Separation		
Reported	0ftV/400m H	
Recorded		NK



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE SAAB 2000 PILOT reports being on a descent into Scatsta. When passing FL70, the crew observed a white Met balloon: he reports that they first had visual contact approximately 5nm away. The pilot elected to take a turn of 20° to avoid the balloon. The weather balloon passed down their right-hand side at a distance of 400m.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

LERWICK MET OFFICE reports that weather balloons are launched daily from Lerwick, at 1115 and 2315. On the 21st January the balloon was launched at 1124, at the time the wind direction was 150-160° at 19kts, gusting 25kts. The balloons used in the day are 1200g (night-time launches use smaller balloons) and beige in colour. Before launch the balloon is as large as a person and it expands as it gains height: before it bursts it can be as big as a house. The parachute fixed to the radiosonde ensures it falls to the ground safely.



Factual Background

The weather at Scatsta was reported as:

EGPM 211120Z 14010KT 9999 VCSH FEW020 FEW027CB 03/00 Q1013=

Analysis and Investigation

CAA ATSI

At 1120 the Saab 2000 reported being at FL70 inbound to Scatsta when the aircraft encountered a Met balloon at a range of approximately 5nm whilst the aircraft was 5nm west of Lerwick. The pilot altered heading by 20° stating that if he did not the risk of collision was high. UK AIP 5.3-6 lists LERWICK as a Radiosonde launching site with balloons launched at 1115, 2315 and occasionally at other times of the day.

Summary

An Airprox was reported on 21st January 2015 at 1131 between a SAAB 2000 and a weather balloon 5nm west of Lerwick. The weather balloon did not show on radar, but the pilot was visual and able to take avoiding action.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from the pilot and Lerwick Met Office, and reports from the appropriate ATC and operating authorities.

The Board noted that the UK AIP clearly states that Lerwick launches Radiosonde weather balloons twice a day and, as such, crews flying in the area should be alert to the possibility of such an encounter; whether he was aware of its likely presence or not, they commended the Saab pilot for his good lookout in spotting the balloon at a distance of 5nm. In discussing the subsequent actions of the Saab pilot, the Board opined that, having reported seeing the balloon from 5nm away, he therefore had plenty of time to make a decision on how best to avoid it. They acknowledged that the Met balloon was relatively large, and that it could have been a surprise to the crew if they weren't expecting to see something of its size. However, members thought that perhaps the pilot could have taken earlier, more positive action to ensure that he didn't fly close enough to the balloon to cause concern. That said, they acknowledged that action had been taken and, because of this, the Board thought that the aircraft wasn't in any danger. They determined the cause of the Airprox to be that the Saab 2000 pilot was concerned by the proximity of the Met balloon, but quickly came to the conclusion that normal procedures and safety standards had pertained in Class G airspace, and therefore the risk was Category E.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: The Saab 2000 pilot was concerned by the proximity of the Met balloon.

Degree of Risk: E.