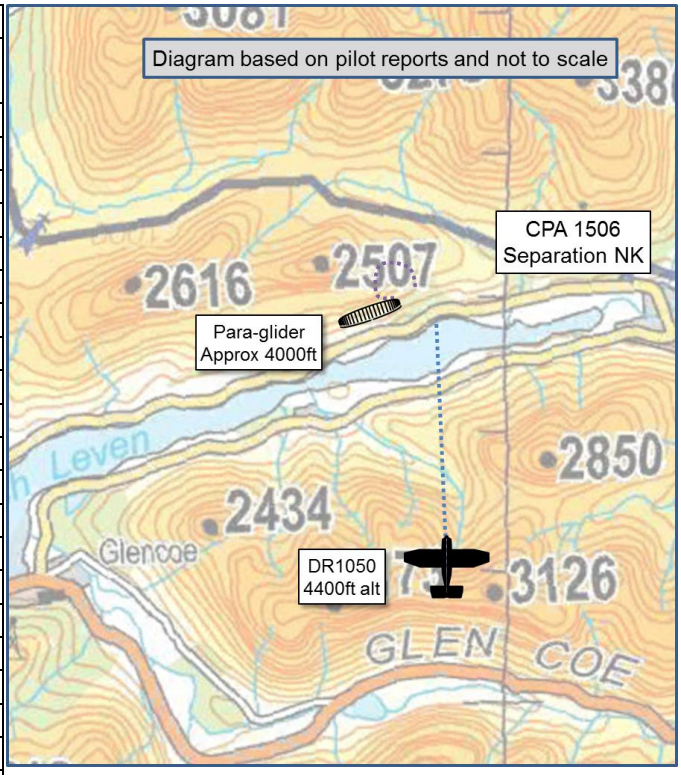
AIRPROX REPORT No 2015056

Date: 1 May 2015 Time: 1506Z Position: 5640N 00503W Location: Glen Coe nr Ben Nevis

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	DR1050	Sigma 9 para-glider
Operator	Civ Club	Civ Pte
Airspace	Scottish FIR	Scottish FIR
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	VFR
Service	None	None
Provider	NA	NA
Altitude/FL	NK	NK
Transponder	A,C,S	Not fitted
Reported		
Colours	White/blue	Green
Lighting	Nil	Nil
Conditions	VMC	VMC
Visibility	40km	10km
Altitude/FL	4400ft	NK
Altimeter	QNH (1013hPa)	NA
Heading	350°	NK
Speed	100kt	15kt
ACAS/TAS	Not fitted	Not fitted
Separation		
Reported	200ft V/200m H	0ftV/100m H
Recorded	NK	



THE DR1050 PILOT reports flying VFR and navigating by local knowledge. It was low-workload and good visibility. He glanced down to check his oil pressure gauge and, when he looked up, he saw a para-glider, who had right of way. He turned to the right, although the turn made very little difference because he was unable to avoid flying close to the para-glider. He had a compact digital camera mounted on the passenger seat and, when he reviewed the footage after landing, he realised that, although it merged with the background, the para-glider was in fact visible much earlier. It was unfortunate timing that he had chosen that moment to check his instruments.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'Medium'.

THE SIGMA 9 PILOT reports that he was on a para-glider cross-country flight. He entered the Glencoe valley from the west fairly low, but managed to thermal up the sunny side of the ridge; however, he was working hard to do so. He eventually cleared the ridgeline and heard what he thought was a motor-bike from the road below. When he came back round in the thermal, facing south, he was head-on and "very close" with a white light aircraft. He tightened the turn to dive down, and the other pilot banked aggressively to the right; it was the light aircraft's right turn that avoided a collision.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

Factual Background

The weather at Inverness was recorded as:

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METAR EGPE 011350Z 06011KT 9999 FEW036 09/01 Q1015
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Analysis and Investigation

UKAB Secretariat

Both pilots shared an equal responsibility for collision avoidance and not to operate in such proximity to other aircraft as to create a collision hazard[1]. When two aircraft are converging at approximately the same level, the aircraft that has the other on its right shall give way, except as follows: (i) power-driven heavier-than-air aircraft shall give way to … sailplanes...[2]

Occurrence Investigation

Although the DR1050 pilot was not receiving an ATS, he was monitoring the frequency 127.27MHz (West Coast) and, after the incident, NATS instigated a unit investigation into the Airprox. The investigation found that the pilot had not made any radio calls prior to the incident, and that neither his aircraft, nor the para-glider, showed on the radar. It concluded that there was nothing that ATC could have done to prevent this incident.

Comments

BHPA

Both pilots were fully entitled to be where they were and doing what they were. The DR1050 pilot had video footage which shows how quickly the visibility of a paraglider can be increased by the instigation of as high a banked turn as possible as soon as possible, and the BHPA will seek permission to use the footage as an educational tool.

Summary

An Airprox was reported on 1 May 2015 at 1506 between a DR1050 and a Sigma 9 para-glider at Glen Coe. Both pilots were operating under VFR in VMC and neither were receiving an ATS. Both pilots took avoiding action; the incident did not show on radar and the exact separation is not known; however, video of the incident was helpfully posted by the pilot of the DR1050 on YouTube and can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7h9k2hCSL80. The paraglider becomes visible at about 2:45 into the video, and CPA occurs about 10 seconds later.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of reports from the pilots of both aircraft and a video recording taken from the cockpit of the DR1050.

The Board noted that both pilots were operating in Class G airspace, where see-and-avoid is the main mitigation against mid-air collision, and both were entitled to be there. In reviewing the video, the paraglider is extremely difficult to see initially (at 2:45) due to its small size and the fact that it blends into a darker horizon as it moves right-to-left across the DR1050's path. It becomes more obvious at 2:50 as it turns through 180° to track left-to-right whilst rapidly blooming in size as separation decreases. The Board opined that it had simply been unfortunate that the DR1050 pilot had been looking into the cockpit initially, but that he had done well to spot the paraglider very quickly after returning his attention to the outside, thus allowing him to take avoiding action. For his part, the paraglider pilot was conducting a turn as the DR1050 came into proximity and appears to have had his back towards the aircraft at the time, thereby limiting his ability to detect the DR1050 at an earlier point. Whether the detection by the DR1050 pilot was due to aspect change of the paraglider canopy or its blooming in size as range decreased is a matter for speculation; however, the Board agreed with the BHPA's overall comment that changing aspect can greatly increase paraglider visibility.

[1] SERA.3205 Proximity.
[2] SERA.3210 Right-of-way.

The Board noted that the DR1050 pilot was listening out of 127.27MHz but was not actively receiving any kind of service whilst doing so. Although not germane to this incident, they commented that he may have been better placed in listening out on 135.475MHz, the new low-level common VHF frequency on trial in Scotland. Although its use may not have had any material effect on this Airprox, the CAA and the military were keen to highlight its potential as a method for resolving conflictions at low-level in Scotland when other services such as LARS were not available.

In assessing the cause of the Airprox, the Board quickly agreed that it was a late sighting by both pilots. Noting that the DR1050 pilot's avoiding action had evidently increased separation, they assessed the risk as Category B; safety margins had been much reduced.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A late sighting by both pilots.

Degree of Risk: B.