

Trends in Wildlife Strike Reporting at the New York City Airports After Flight 1549

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ABSTRACT: The number of wildlife strikes reported to the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Wildlife Strike Database has significantly increased since US Airways Flight 1549 ditched into the Hudson River after striking a flock of Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) while departing from LaGuardia Airport in New York City on January 15, 2009. This event made headlines around the world and had a profound effect on wildlife management at airports. Following the 2009 Miracle on the Hudson, The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates five airports in the New York City region, implemented several initiatives to enhance the proactive wildlife hazard management programs that had been in place for decades at the Port Authority airports. These initiatives included centralizing the wildlife programs to ensure that best management practices were being implemented, hiring additional wildlife personnel, partnering with surrounding landowners to address hazards posed by Canada geese and other hazardous species found on off-airport properties, conducting wildlife hazard assessments and implementing wildlife monitoring programs, and enhancing educational efforts within the airport community. Despite these efforts, wildlife strike data from the Port Authority's John F. Kennedy International Airport, LaGuardia Airport, and Newark Liberty International Airport indicated a significant increase in the annual strike rate (number of strikes per 10,000 aircraft movements) following the 2009 water landing. A detailed analysis of these data found that strike rates with most large species (geese, gulls, large raptors, and other large birds) and hazardous flocking birds decreased or remained constant while the number of strikes with small less hazardous species (warblers, non-flocking songbirds, bats, etc.) nearly doubled since the 2009 event. Analyses also indicated that the number of damaging strike reported each year was low and that there was no increase in the damaging strike rate following Flight 1549.

These data suggest that the initiatives implemented by the Port Authority following Flight 1549 effectively target the most hazardous species. Although these data also show a significant increase in the number of strikes with small species, it is likely that this is only a perceived increase and that prior to Flight 1549 many of these strikes were not noticed and/or reported to the airports or FAA. Increased awareness on a national level and as a result of increased educational efforts within the airport communities has likely resulted in more accurate strike reporting.

Key Words: airport, avian airstrike, wildlife hazard management

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