

# GUIDELINES FOR THE RELEASE OF RACING PIGEONS



Issued by the Safety Regulation Division of the  
Irish Aviation Authority

## Introduction

The Safety Regulation Division of the Irish Aviation Authority has issued the following guidelines for the release of racing pigeons for the purpose of ensuring safety of aircraft and passengers and crew travelling therein. The guidelines are available to all Racing Pigeon Clubs and all owners of racing pigeons.



## Why are racing pigeons a hazard for aircraft?

Racing pigeons are a predictable hazard to both civil and military aviation. There are four main reasons why they are hazardous to aircraft:



- (1) Racing pigeons are heavy birds - weighing at least 450g i.e. almost half a kilo;
- (2) Racing pigeons fly in flocks, which, in the case of pigeon races may involve 30,000 birds. Flocks cause multiple bird strikes i.e. where several or many birds strike an aircraft. This in turn increases the risk of a bird or birds entering the jet engine. Most commercial jets (e.g. Boeing 737, 777, Airbus A320, A330) have two very large diameter engine intakes, so the risk of birds entering both engines increases when a flock strikes the aircraft;
- (3) Racing pigeons travel at speeds of up to 70 mph, which means that there may be insufficient time for pilots and or birds to take evasive action thus increasing the risk of collision;
- (4) Racing pigeons fly at low altitudes of the order of 300ft and therefore if a collision occurs it happens as the aircraft is at a critical phase of flight having either just taken off or when it is about to land;

In addition, racing pigeons do not usually respond to conventional bird control measures at airports and as they are wild animals, their behavior is predictable only to a limited extent.

Military aircraft have been lost due to bird strikes with racing pigeons and in 2003, a catastrophic bird strike incident occurred when a Learjet crashed near Milan Linate Airport (all on board were killed) following a collision with racing pigeons. There are numerous cases of serious damage to aircraft at Dublin Airport caused by strikes with racing pigeons.

It is recommended therefore that the actions set out overleaf concerning the release of racing pigeons and related matters are adhered to.



The photographs above highlight the significant damage caused to parts of an aircraft as a result of a bird strike incident.

## What is being done to reduce this hazard?

Airports are required under their applicable license or certificate to manage bird hazard activity. The most effective means of doing so is to manage the environment in the vicinity of the airport so that it does not attract birds. Typically, airport operators object to planning applications for landfill sites close to the airport, adopt a long grass policy and ensure that areas of standing water within the airfield are eliminated. Many other measures are taken on a daily basis to manage the hazard such as playing audio tapes of distress calls, driving along the runway firing shots from a V pistol and suspending aircraft movements if bird activity warrants such action.

A register of all bird strikes is maintained by the State and annual statistics are reported to ICAO. All bird strikes are investigated in order to determine the species of bird involved and the circumstances of the incident. This work is done so that action can be taken to prevent a similar incident occurring at some future date.

## Action required by Racing Pigeon Clubs and Pigeon Owners to minimize this hazard

- (a) A calendar of planned races should be supplied to the IAA and to all airport operators listed prior to the start of the racing season;
- (b) A list, with accompanying telephone numbers and email addresses of reliable and available contact persons from the pigeon clubs, should be sent to the IAA and the airport operators with the racing calendar;
- (c) In the event that the date of a scheduled race is changed, a nominated person shall inform the airport operator and the IAA (SRD Aerodromes Division) at least ten days before a planned liberation;
- (d) It is recommended that releases involving large numbers of birds should be avoided within 50km of the east coast of Ireland so as to prevent large numbers of birds crossing the runway approaches to Dublin Airport. However, liberations of birds may be undertaken (1) south of the Dublin Mountains where the intended route of the birds is to the south and (2) north of Lusk where the intended route is to the north;
- (e) If liberating large numbers of birds within 10km of an airport, a nominated person from the club shall phone the relevant airport operator one hour in advance with the precise liberation time (see telephone numbers below);
- (f) A nominated person should contact the relevant ATC Station Manager when birds have been released;

## The release of racing pigeons along the N7/M7/M9 Corridor

The release of racing pigeons along the N7/M7/M9 corridor, where the intention is to route to lofts in the West, South and North Dublin suburbs, **is prohibited**. Racing pigeon releases to these areas may be released in the Blessington area.

### Summary:

Racing pigeons are a significant hazard for the safety of aircraft. In order to reduce the risk of a bird strike, it is essential that these guidelines are complied with and that communication is established and maintained with the relevant aerodromes. The guidelines are not to be taken as a guarantee that an accident due to a bird strike with racing pigeons will not occur.

They are the **Minimum Safety Standards** that should be followed in order to try and prevent such an occurrence.

Dublin Airport – 01 8141111	Cork Airport – 021 4313131	Shannon Airport – 061 712000
Air Traffic Control – 01 8144601	Air Traffic Control – 021 4237853	Air Traffic Control – 061 471868
Donegal Airport - 074 9548284	Kerry Airport – 066 9764644	Ireland West Airport – 094 9368100
Sligo Airport - 071 9168280	Waterford Airport - 051 846600	
Irish Air Corps – Daytime Phone No. 01 4037502. Out of Hours Phone No. 01 4037900 Email: <a href="mailto:MDL_aircorps_ops@defenceforces.ie">MDL_aircorps_ops@defenceforces.ie</a>		Irish Aviation Authority – SRD Aerodromes Division Phone No 01 6718655