AIRPROX Insight

DIRECTOR UKAB'S MONTHLY UPDATE April 2023

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AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Yes, but is it the right service?

You might think you have the correct assistance from ATC, but is it appropriate for what you actually need it to be right now…?

I often highlight the importance of pilot situational awareness and ways it can be improved. It's notable that in only eight percent of the 2022 Airprox that the Board has so far assessed has the Flight Elements-Situational Awareness barrier been effective, which is a worrying statistic and the reason why I tend to bang on about it.

It's not always a case of having the 'correct' electronic conspicuity equipment or of planning thoroughly and having contingency plans (although both of these will obviously help); what's equally important is communication and the selection of an appropriate service from ATC. This month I have chosen an Airprox (**2022249**) between a DA40 and an EC155 where both pilots were receiving a service from different ATC units but neither had any idea that the other aircraft was there.

The DA40 pilot was on an instructional flight, slightly north of Milton Keynes, positioning for an RNP approach to Cranfield and receiving a Procedural Service from Cranfield Approach when they received an alert on their TAS of an aircraft in close proximity. The EC155 pilot was southbound towards the Luton CTR, in contact with the Luton controller to facilitate their CTR crossing under, at the time, a Basic Service. They received a momentary audio warning from their TCAS but there was no associated symbol on their TCAS screen. Both pilots were in IMC.

What struck me when I first read the reports from the pilots is that neither was in a position to have their situational awareness enhanced by their respective controllers. The Cranfield Approach controller does not have surveillance equipment available and so, under a Procedural Service, can only pass Traffic Information on traffic known to them – the EC155 was not known traffic to the Cranfield Approach controller. The Luton controller was busy with a number of Luton arrivals and so had placed the EC155 pilot under a Basic Service on initial contact due to their workload. This meant that the controller would not have been required to monitor the EC155 (and they probably couldn't have done anyway) which suggests that the EC155 pilot was highly unlikely to have received any Traffic Information. This raises a question over the suitability of the respective Air Traffic Services for the conditions in which both pilots found themselves (IMC).

As I'm sure we all know, under UK FIS, the pilot is always ultimately responsible for collision avoidance. What this means in reality is that the controller will normally inform the pilot where the traffic is, and the pilot will take appropriate action. This kind of 'contract' with the controller usually means that the pilot will look outside for the traffic and, when sighted, judge whether or not any action is necessary.

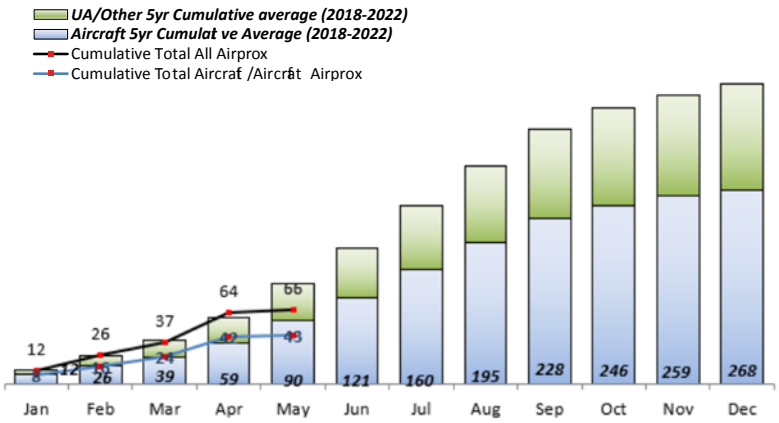
Of course, if the pilot is unable to see traffic coming, for instance when they are flying in cloud, they will probably be unable keep their side of the 'contract'. So, what options are available when this is the case? Well, if flying under IFR then a Deconfliction Service can be requested (if the controller is surveillance-equipped), which means the controller will issue headings and/or levels to maintain the prescribed separation minima from other aircraft.

If that isn't an option (such as when flying under VFR or, as in this case, where one controller did not have any surveillance equipment and the other was unable to offer any level of service beyond a Basic Service) then the best course of action is to change heading or level to break the confliction (you don't have to wait to see the other aircraft). Or, as was probably the only option in this case due to there being no Traffic Information from either controller, try to get into VMC as quickly as possible so that you stand a chance of seeing other traffic. This was just the course of action that the DA40 pilot took when they got the alert from their TAS – knowing that a descent below the cloud could be easily achieved.

What we learn from this Airprox is that the weather doesn't always fit with the intended flight profile, and so it's useful at the planning stage to consider what we might do should we encounter poor weather along the way. Will I call a different agency? Will I ask for a higher level of service? What will I do if I can't get that higher level of service?

Maybe the following is worth considering when flying in Class G airspace: If in IMC then a Deconfliction Service is preferred. If unable (eg the pilot is not qualified) then a Traffic Service but seek VMC ASAP. Spend as little time as possible in IMC with a Basic Service, irrespective of the equipment fit of your aircraft (it won't detect everything out there, and the controller may well not be monitoring your aircraft and the aircraft around you).

2023 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution



UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

This month the Board evaluated 23 Airprox, including four UA/Other, three of which were reported by the piloted aircraft and one by the drone operator. Of the 20 full evaluations, eight were classified as risk-bearing – one category A and seven were category B.

The Board made three Safety Recommendations at the March meeting, two regarding a number of Airprox in the vicinity of Cranfield: that *'The Cranfield aerodrome operator considers a means by which controller SA of traffic utilising airspace surrounding the Cranfield ATZ can be improved',* and that *'Cranfield-based training organisations review their risk assessments with respect to their local operations without a surveillance-based ATS'.* A further Recommendation related to a different Airprox that took place close to Gloucester: that *'Gloucestershire Airport considers applying for an SSR transponder conspicuity code'.*

The graphic above shows that the number of Airprox reports received so far in 2023 is more-or-less where we would expect it to be. However, I feel that the weather has played a larger-than-usual part in this so we will wait and see if, as the weather improves, the level of reporting increases beyond the expected number.

It goes without saying that the weather plays a crucial part in aviation and how many of us can say that we've never been caught out by the weather not being as expected/forecast? As with many things, apply the 5Ps (Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance) and think ahead – before you get airborne – as to what you will do should the weather not be as you were expecting.