AIR **PROX** *Insight*

Picture: Shutterstock.com/Vanderwolf Images

AIRPROX OF THE MONTH

Get in there early

Whatever you might think, it's good to talk – you might be surprised how helpful it can be

There's no doubt the advent of flight planning and navigation software in General Aviation is of huge benefit to aviation in general – it can save time in pre-flight preparation, help us to avoid airspace that we don't want to go into and also acts as the display mechanism for many of the electronic conspicuity solutions currently available.

These applications also provide a whole raft of information at a touch of the screen, which is clearly far easier than wading through the UK AIP and other publications. However, if we are going to use these electronic tools, are we fully familiar with what they can, and can't, show us, and how to quickly access information we need?

With that in mind, I'm highlighting **Airprox 2023045** this month which involved an Apache helicopter and an Arcus glider. The Apache pilot was conducting 'one engine inoperative' circuits at Middle

Wallop and the glider pilot was in search of lift just to the west of the Middle Wallop ATZ. Although the Apache doesn't have any electronic conspicuity equipment, the glider was carrying three different forms, including a transponder (that was switched on) and ADS-B out.

The Middle Wallop controller had seen the glider's transponder signal on their radar-repeater equipment and warned the Apache pilot of the glider's proximity, but they could not pass information to the glider pilot because they were not on the Middle Wallop frequency. In the event, the Apache pilot sighted the glider, but the Board assessed that the glider pilot had not seen the Apache when both were at their closest.

So what does this all have to do with communication? Well, the glider pilot had arrived near Middle Wallop from the west, transiting through the Boscombe Down CMATZ, overhead Old Sarum airfield and

found themselves very close to the Middle Wallop ATZ without having spoken to either Boscombe Down or Middle Wallop. While there is absolutely no requirement for the glider pilot to have contacted anyone, a call could have assisted everyone's situational awareness.

Of course, an appropriate FRTOL is required in order to speak to controllers (in fact, the Air Navigation Order 2016, Article 139 prohibits communication with ATC unless that licence is held) but, in this case, the glider pilot did have that licence and used it about 15 minutes later to get permission to cross the Middle Wallop ATZ.

Communicating earlier with either unit would most likely have led to the glider pilot being made aware of the circuit traffic at Middle Wallop and, importantly, would have given the controller the opportunity to have warned the glider pilot about their proximity to the ATZ.

There was a lot of discussion at the UKAB Board Meeting as to whether or not the glider pilot had actually penetrated the Middle Wallop ATZ and, thanks to an accurate GPS trace provided by the glider pilot, we were able to establish that they had remained outside the ATZ until they had gained permission to enter. It's also worth noting that squawking 7000 and/or having an ABS-B out signal does not provide controllers with any information regarding the pilot's intentions – the only way controllers can glean this information is if a pilot tells them.
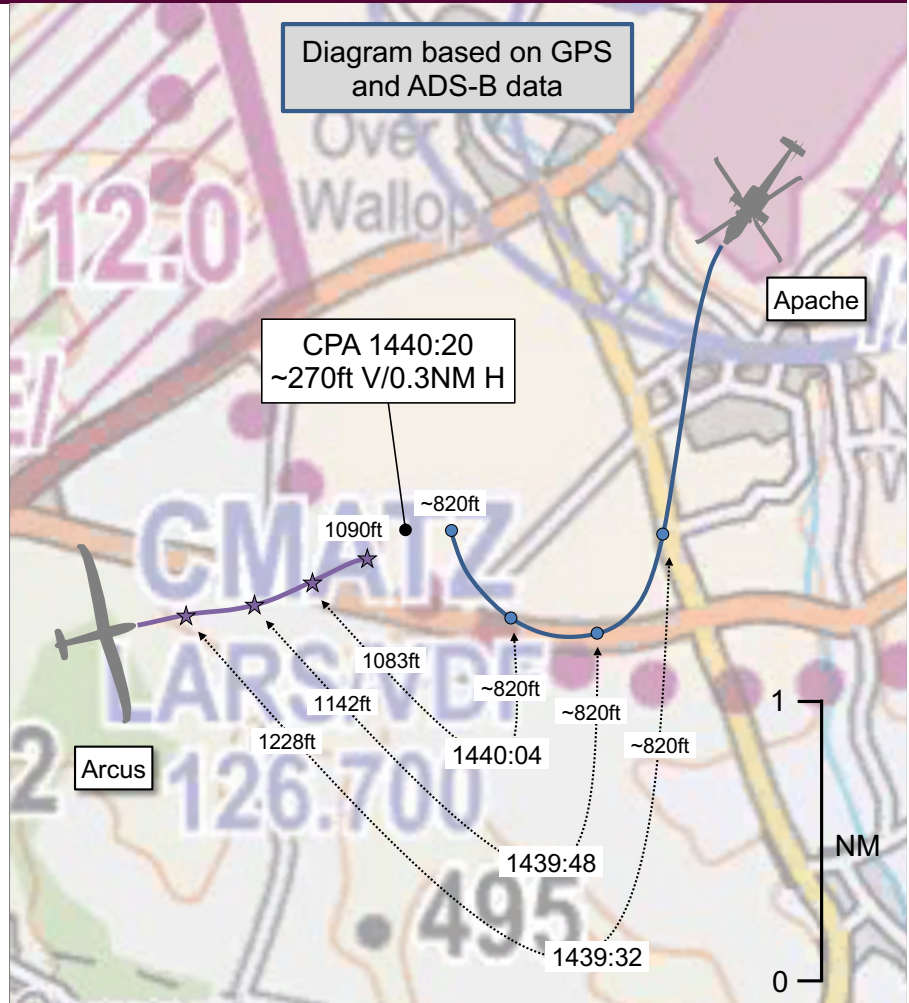
There's no doubt that the glider pilot was working hard to stay aloft when the Airprox took place – it seems they were around 500-700ft agl and were clearly looking for lift (which, happily, they found a short time later), but the point I really want to draw out is that perhaps an earlier to call to Boscombe Down or to Middle Wallop, before finding a thermal had become critical, might have lightened their workload rather than increasing it. As it was, they were working alone at trying to find lift, trying to stay out of airspace that they did not have permission to enter and also looking out for other aircraft – perhaps the controller could have helped them out with the latter two tasks?

The final thing I want to mention is that the CAA VFR paper charts have appropriate frequencies printed next to the airfield, so if you are relying on your tablet to provide you with all the necessary information don't forget that it is easily accessible on the paper chart (yes, I'm afraid that I am a luddite!).
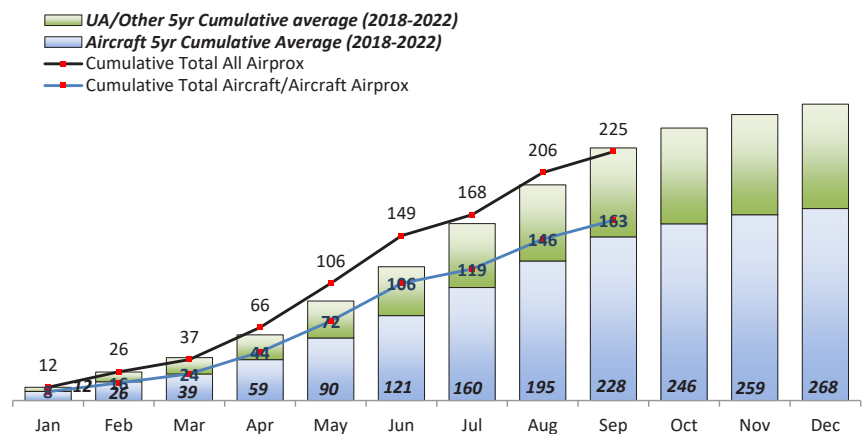
UKAB MONTHLY ROUND-UP

This month the Board evaluated 28 Airprox, including 11 UA/Other events, ten of which were reported by the piloted aircraft and one by the drone operator. Of the 18 full evaluations, seven were classified as risk-bearing – all as category B.

The Board also raised one Safety Recommendation: during the assessment of an Airprox between an aircraft departing and an aircraft joining Turweston, members noted that the joining instructions for Turweston instruct pilots to join at circuit height. The Board felt this might increase the chance of a conflict as there is no height separation built-in between aircraft joining, established in or leaving the circuit, and so has asked Turweston to review its published joining procedures.

Diagram based on GPS and ADS-B data

CPA 1440:20 ~270ft V/0.3NM H

Apache

Arcus

~820ft
1090ft
1083ft
1142ft
1228ft
1440:04
~820ft
~820ft
~820ft
1439:48
1439:32

1
NM
0

2023 Airprox - Cumulative Distribution

UA/Other 5yr Cumulative average (2018-2022)
Aircraft 5yr Cumulative Average (2018-2022)
Cumulative Total All Airprox
Cumulative Total Aircraft/Aircraft Airprox

As we head towards the final throes of the traditional GA flying season, Airprox reporting for the year so far is very similar – in terms of numbers – to that of 2022. We are also seeing similar factors contributing to Airprox as in previous years – mostly around pilots' situational awareness and electronic conspicuity (EC) equipment that is either incompatible or doesn't alert the pilot to the proximity of another aircraft when it would have been expected to do so.

So, as we head towards the winter it might be worth reviewing your EC equipment needs and taking advantage of the continuing EC rebate that the DfT is offering through the CAA — but don't delay, it's nearing its end with the application window closing on March 31, 2024.
For more info take a look at the information at this link.

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