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Turkish officers visit Offutt seeking BASH solution

by David R. Hopper
55th Wing Public Affairs

7/20/2011 - **OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE, Neb.** -- In search of a bird strike solution, three members of the Turkish Air Force visited here July 12 to learn about Offutt's Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard program and to see the MERLIN Aircraft Birdstrike Avoidance Radar System in action.

"The Turkish air force doesn't have a BASH program like you have here," said Maj. M. Mustafa Gedik of the Turkish Air Force. "I have been studying the MERLIN system for about 1 1/2 years now. At first I didn't really understand it, but now I am feeling pretty positive about it."

The Turkish air force officers visited several areas during their visit, including the MERLIN radar site to learn about the radar's components. They also went to the control tower where they got to see the MERLIN in operation.

Offutt installed the MERLIN bird radar in February 2009 to provide real time bird strike risk information to support the Offutt mission. The MERLIN station installation here includes a real-time display of bird activity and strike risk alerts to the air traffic control tower.

"Offutt leadership from the wing commander all the way down to the individual supervisors of flying, have embraced the MERLIN radar system and have fully integrated its use into daily flight operations," said Maj. Gavin Gigstead, the 55th Wing chief of flight safety. "In the past, flying operations were curtailed during migratory seasons based only on calendar dates. Now, Offutt adjusts flying operations during migratory seasons in real time based on data from the MERLIN radar and reports from local wildlife refuges."

This system has allowed our flight operations to regain additional flight hours every season added Gigstead.

Since fiscal year 2004, Offutt has had more than \$9.15 million in aircraft damage due to bird strikes. In fiscal year 2010, the overall number of bird strikes was down more than 12 percent.

Offutt has a variety of birds to watch out for - from small birds all the way up to raptors and snow geese. While smaller birds may cause little to no damage, a large snow goose can cause major damage to aircraft engines, added Gigstead.

"Our MERLIN radar is now in its third year of operation," said Gigstead. "So far this year, bird strikes haven't cost Offutt anything."

"We appreciate the hospitality that has been shown and thank you for showing us your program," said Gedik.

"After the MERLIN radar system was installed, a dramatic reduction in the number of large-bird strikes has occurred," said Gigstead. "Offutt aircraft will always be subjected to bird strikes, but the majority now is small birds that do very little to no damage."



Turkish air force Maj. Bulent Cankaya (left) gets information from Maj. Gavin Gigstead, 55th Wing chief of flight safety, regarding the MERLIN Avian Radar Warning System at Offutt July 12. The radar system protects incoming and outgoing aircraft from local bird populations that can cause significant damage if they strike an aircraft. (U.S. Air Force photo by Josh Plueger/Released)