



Ministry
of Defence

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Thank you for your email of 3 June 2014 requesting the following information:

"I gather that RAF Benson has been granted a licence for the culling of Red Kites. Can you please tell me the details of the licence eg. Under what circumstances, where when etc...With probably in excess of 2000 Red Kites in the Chilterns does the license specify a maximum number to be killed, either overall or daily/monthly/annually?"

Presumably this is a "last resort" measure so can you tell me what other measures have been put in place, tried or intended in the future to minimise the perceived danger to helicopters.

I am aware of two previous air strikes between helicopters and Red Kites on 24 July 2012 and 22 July 2013, both of which resulted in "nil" damage to the helicopters. Have any further air strikes with red Kites taken place in the vicinity of Benson Airfield and, if so, exactly where?

Can you please provide details of any other bird strikes associated with the RAF Benson airfield area not involving Red Kites and the resulting damage to aircraft, both fixed wing and helicopters."

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that information in scope of your request is held. I have responded to each of your questions in turn below:

"I gather that RAF Benson has been granted a licence for the culling of Red Kites. Can you please tell me the details of the licence eg. Under what circumstances, where when etc."

The licence, which lasts for 12 months, was granted in Sep 2013 following recommendation by the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories (AHVL) and support from Natural England. The licence has been issued to preserve public health, the public and to maintain air safety.

"Presumably this is a "last resort" measure so can you tell me what other measures have been put in place, tried or intended in the future to minimise the perceived danger to helicopters."

The Station has a contracted Bird Control Unit (BCU) whose sole task is to minimise the risk of bird strikes to aircraft. The BCU employs industry standard, government approved, procedures to achieve this such as habitat management and habituation. Habitat management is where grass is allowed to grow to prevent birds from landing to find food, nests are removed and various other roosting prevention measures are undertaken. The BCU has extended this to cover a thirteen nautical mile radius beyond the airfield through discussions with local farmers, refuse sites and other high bird activity areas to increase awareness and attempt to mitigate bird concentrations by efficient waste management measures. With the Red Kite the long grass has no effect and whilst bird scaring cartridges do remove them from where they are temporarily, they don't move very far and soon return.

Habituation is also used on the airfield including the use of recorded distress calls and bird scaring cartridges. For the majority of species the habituation process has a long term effect on bird concentrations. Again, this does not work with the Red Kite.

One of the reasons that Red Kites congregate in the area of the airfield is that local residents feed them. The unit started trying to address this issue in 2010 with an article in the local press. Natural England and the RSPB have also written to local residents to urge them to cease feeding the Red Kites. Unfortunately, the feeding has not ceased and RAF Benson was left with no choice but to request a licence to cull a small number for safety reasons.

“With probably in excess of 2000 Red Kites in the Chilterns does the license specify a maximum number to be killed, either overall or daily/monthly/annually?”

The licence allows us the cull of up to two Red Kites within the year period of the licence to preserve public health, the public or to maintain air safety.

“I am aware of two previous air strikes between helicopters and Red Kites on 24 July 2012 and 22 July 2013, both of which resulted in “nil” damage to the helicopters. Have any further air strikes with red Kites taken place in the vicinity of Benson Airfield and, if so, exactly where? Can you please provide details of any other bird strikes associated with the RAF Benson airfield area not involving Red Kites and the resulting damage to aircraft, both fixed wing and helicopters.”

There have been five further bird strikes involving the Red Kite in the vicinity of the airfield at RAF Benson. The table below summarises these, and a further five involving other bird species.

Date	Species	Aircraft	Location
18 Mar 11	Red Kite	Merlin	Hungerford
30 Mar 12	Crow	Cessna	Benson Airfield
20 Jun 12	Red Kite	Lynx	Great Ridge, Wiltshire
24 Jul 12	Red Kite	Sea King (SAR)	Benson Airfield
21 Sep 12	Gull	Merlin	Benson Airfield
12 Jul 13	Red Kite	Merlin	Benson Airfield
20 Oct 13	Unknown	Cessna	Benson Airfield
29 Apr 14	Red Kite	Merlin	Benson Airfield
5 May 14	Red Kite	Tutor	Benson Airfield
15 May 14	Crow	Merlin	Benson Airfield

The incidents shown in the table resulted in the aircraft being categorised as 'Category 1', which meant that engineers were tasked to ascertain if damage had been caused and whether any subsequent repair was needed. All inspections resulted in 'nil damage' as the location of the bird strikes on the aircraft were not in any of the areas that are especially vulnerable to damage such

as the engine, where any bird ingestion could result in catastrophic loss of power, or the loss of the single axis or hydraulics to the main rotor head which is fatal to the aircraft.

In total there have been 142 bird strikes involving RAF Benson helicopters since July 2009 – this figure increases to 842 bird strikes when operational theatres are included.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Deputy Chief Information Officer, 2nd Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.ico.gov.uk>.

Please quote the reference number above in any future communication.

Yours sincerely,

Army Secretariat