

## **AGRICULTURE ON AIRFIELDS: SHORT-TERM BENEFIT, LONG-TERM LOSS**

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### **Abstract**

Though it may appear intuitively evident that agricultural utilization of open spaces at airfields would be counterproductive to the reduction of bird strike hazards, there are still a large number of airports and airbases around the world that routinely manage farmland on their airfields. The reasons behind this are varied but the primary rationales are the economic benefit enjoyed from the rental or direct income produced from the fields and the inability to effectively manage the airfield habitat without outside assistance. This short-term benefit, however, can be well offset by the long-term costs associated with bird and wildlife strikes.

Agriculture, and its associated actions of plowing, seeding, and harvesting, serves as an attractant to many forms of birds and wildlife. Some birds are attracted to the fields primarily to feed on the insects and worms brought to the surface by the activities of the farmers, such as tilling and seeding. Other birds are attracted to the seeds in the field, either planted by the farmers or as a product of the actual agricultural crop. In addition, the activities of farming attract other forms of wildlife, including insects and rodents that come to feed on the crops and seeds. These in turn, attract more insect-eating birds and raptors that come to hunt the increased population of rodents. In essence, planting crops anywhere near a runway is an extremely bad idea if one is looking to reduce the potential risk for costly bird strikes.

We will look at the efforts of the wildlife management program of the Israeli Air Force to eliminate agricultural practices on its airbases, as well as the barriers and difficulties imposed by a system dependent on civilian airfield habitat management. Studies conducted at Ramat David AFB in northern Israel over a two-year period demonstrated the effectiveness of minimizing agriculture at the airbase in order to reduce bird populations, as well as the overwhelming results achieved with the eventual elimination of agriculture altogether.

**Key words:** agriculture, birds, Airfield Habitat Management, wildlife control, Israeli Air Force