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European Starlings fly before they fledge

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Abstract. Bird/wildlife Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) wildlife biologists from the United States Department of Agriculture/Animal and Plant Health Inspection service/Wildlife Services (USDA/APHIS/WS) are employed by many airports to mitigate and/or eliminate wildlife strikes. European starlings (*Sturnella vulgaris, EUST)* are an invasive species in the United States which can cause significant economic damage and human fatalities when struck by aircraft. Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC) Point Mugu is a naval air station 35 miles northwest of Los Angeles in Ventura County, California that employs WS BASH biologists to manage a wide range of vertebrate aircraft hazards. On 9 May 2018 BASH wildlife biologists on base were contacted to investigate a EUST nest found in a Brasilia Embraer-120 aircraft. We removed an active nest from inside the tail fin containing three downy chicks. In order to determine the length of time the nest went undiscovered, we fed and cared for the chicks until fully fledged to estimate the date the eggs were laid. WS wildlife biologists estimated that the nest was actively tended in the tail fin for approximately 19 days until its removal upon discovery. During this period, the aircraft made 27 round trip flights to Naval Air Warfare Station China Lake (217 km) and NBVC San Nicolas Island (105 km). The low temperatures at flight altitudes suggest that the eggs would not have survived unless being incubated during flight, indicating that the adult birds were also transported long distances. Similar incidents may introduce invasive fauna to novel territory and could create unexpected and potentially fatal BASH incidents. Management recommendations derived from this incident include: 1. Regular and thorough aircraft inspections targeted at potential invasive species and BASH threats. Inspections should be conducted at departing and arriving airfields. 2. Managers should develop a plan for addressing stow-away fauna that includes specific methods of detecting, containing, and neutralizing avian, reptilian, mammalian, and invertebrate threats. 3. Maintenance personnel should be encouraged to report any similar incidents to BASH biologists in order to more fully understand the scope of this type of event. Although not a sufficient sample size to analyze or draw statistical conclusions, this episode may be of interest to biologists working in the fields of invasive species control, BASH mitigation, and/or airfield management.