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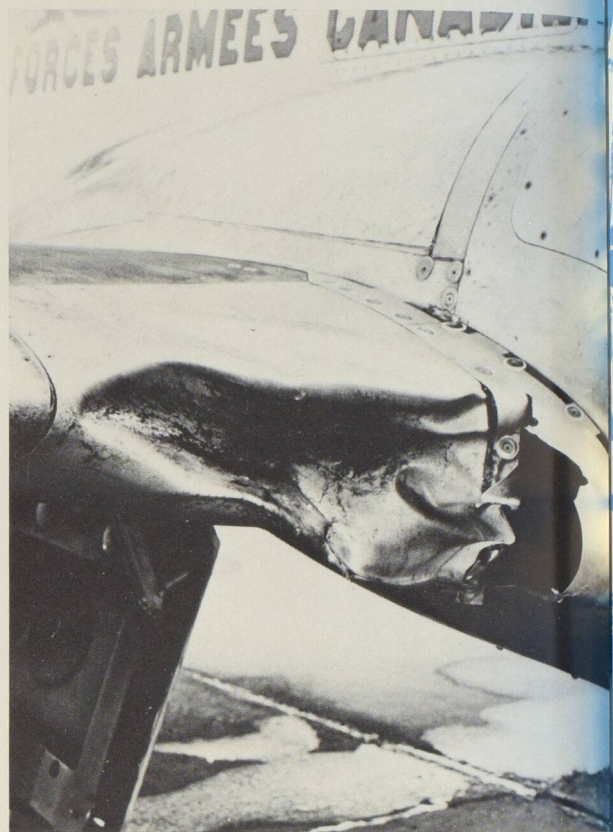
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Bird strike deterrent A feigned falcon



Significant progress has been made in reducing the number of bird-aircraft collisions, but still much remains to be done. At the speed aircraft travel today, the impact of even small birds can shatter a windshield, puncture a wing, or completely destroy a jet engine.

At Vancouver International Airport, when the usual deterrents such as shell crackers, gas cannons, use of live shot and runway patrol vehicles failed to dispel large flocks of small shore birds called dunlins (sometimes numbering 8,000), the problem was brought to the attention of the National Research Council of Canada's Associate Committee on Bird Hazards to Aircraft. Studies were initiated using live falcons and radio-controlled model aircraft as deterrents. The former method proved effective, but because of the costs involved in maintenance and training, falcons would be used only if other methods failed. The use of conventional-shaped model aircraft did not have the desired effect.

Ornithologists advised the Committee that most birds are alerted by the shape of a predator. Would a falcon-shaped model aircraft then be more successful than a conventional-shaped one?

Captain Robert Randall (right), a DC-8 pilot with CP Air who undertook to build a radio-controlled falcon-shaped model, is shown here with Captain Gordon Richardson, a member of the Committee. Trials were carried out last year and the results proved successful. Dunlins, ducks, gulls and geese treated the falcon-shaped model as a potential threat and were effectively dispersed from the area. It still has to be determined if, through repeated exposure to the model, the birds will learn that it is different from a live falcon and not a threat to them. Further testing will be required before the technique can be fully evaluated. □