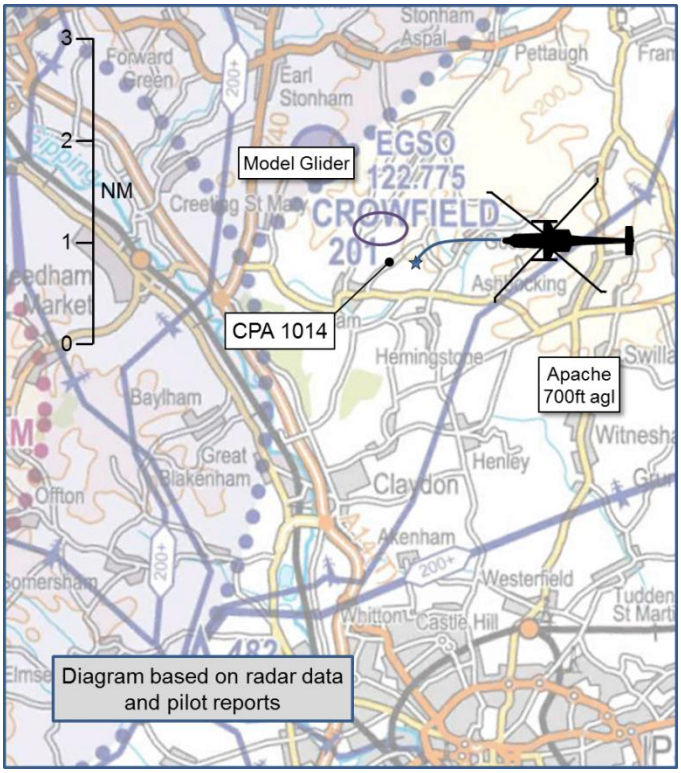
AIRPROX REPORT No 2015051

Date: 24 Apr 2015 Time: 1014Z Position: 5208N 00108E Location: Wattisham

PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

Recorded	Aircraft 1	Aircraft 2
Aircraft	Apache	Model Glider
Operator	HQ JHC	Unknown
Airspace	Lon FIR	Lon FIR
Class	G	G
Rules	VFR	NK
Service	Basic	None
Provider	Wattisham	NK
Altitude/FL	700ft	NK
Transponder	A,C,S	NK
Reported		
Colours	Black/Green	White/yellow
Lighting	Strobes and Nav lights	Nil
Conditions	VMC	NK
Visibility	30km	NK
Altitude/FL	700ft	NK
Altimeter	QNH (1011hPa)	NK
Heading	250°	NK
Speed	100kt	NK
ACAS/TAS	Not fitted	NK
Separation		
Reported	0ft V/50m H	NK
Recorded	NK	



THE APACHE PILOT reports that he was flying straight-and-level at 700ft agl. The non-handling-pilot was "heads-in" when the rear-seat handling-pilot had to take avoiding action for a large model glider that was 2-3m in wingspan and estimated to be 50m from the aircraft. He described the model as white with yellow stripes and under fuselage markings, and reported it was aggressively manoeuvring. He rolled the aircraft rapidly to the right to avoid a collision and saw the glider turn left and descend. The incident was immediately notified to Wattisham ATC.

He assessed the risk of collision as 'High'.

THE MODEL GLIDER OPERATOR could not be traced.

THE WATTISHAM CONTROLLER reports he was the approach controller when the Apache reported a minor malfunction and returned to Wattisham from the East. As the Apache approached the MATZ boundary at approximately 700ft, the controller noticed it suddenly veered to the left. The pilot then reported taking avoiding action on a large model glider, with a wing span of 2-3m, possibly radio controlled, which had flown within 100m of his aircraft. The pilot sounded shaken by the event. There was no radar contact in the area, although the controller noted that the radar head for Wattisham is sited at Honington, some 15nm away, so it would be unlikely to see a small model aircraft at that level.

He perceived the severity of the incident as 'High'.

Factual Background

The weather at Wattisham was reported as:

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METAR EGUW 240950Z 22009KT CAVOK 15/06 Q1011 BLU NOSIG
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Analysis and Investigation

Military ATM

The Wattisham Approach controller recalled the Apache showing on radar at 700ft (QNH 1011 hPa) following a minor technical malfunction. At approximately 6nm east of Wattisham, the Apache was observed to veer left and the pilot reported an Airprox with a model glider. The controller did not see a radar contact in the vicinity of the Apache. The Supervisor commented that the Apache was between 500 -700ft AGL and as the radar head was 15nm from the airfield, there was no expectation of seeing the model glider on radar.

The Approach controller was providing a Basic Service to an aircraft returning to base, and the pilot was responsible for collision avoidance, as per CAP774. It is highly unlikely that a model glider would be detected by the radar and, given the low level and range from the radar head; it would not be expected to produce a return on the controller's radar display. Ultimately, for an aircraft not fitted with an ACAS, see-and-avoid was the only barrier to preventing a collision.

UKAB Secretariat

The Air Navigation Order 2009 (as amended), Article 138[1] states:

> 'A person must not recklessly or negligently cause or permit an aircraft to endanger any person or property.'

Article 166, paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 state:

> '(2) The person in charge of a small unmanned aircraft may only fly the aircraft if reasonably satisfied that the flight can safely be made.
> (3) The person in charge of a small unmanned aircraft must maintain direct, unaided visual contact with the aircraft sufficient to monitor its flight path in relation to other aircraft, persons, vehicles, vessels and structures for the purpose of avoiding collisions.'
> (4) The person in charge of a small unmanned aircraft which has a mass of more than 7kg excluding its fuel but including any articles or equipment installed in or attached to the aircraft at the commencement of its flight must not fly the aircraft
> (a) in Class A, C, D or E airspace unless the permission of the appropriate air traffic control unit has been obtained;
> (b) within an aerodrome traffic zone …; or
> (c) at a height of more than 400 feet above the surface unless it is flying in airspace described in sub-paragraph (a) or (b) and in accordance with the requirements for that airspace.'

Comments

JHC

Having seen the glider, the AH crew carried out the correct avoiding action to minimise the risk to life.

[1] Article 253 of the ANO details which Articles apply to small unmanned aircraft. Article 255 defines 'small unmanned aircraft'. The ANO is available to view at http://www.legislation.gov.uk.

Summary

An Airprox was reported on 24 April 2015 at 1010, between an Apache helicopter and a model glider. The Apache was returning to Wattisham at 700ft and receiving a Basic Service from Wattisham ATC when he encountered the glider at a similar level. The model glider did not show on the Wattisham radar so Traffic Information was not given. The Apache pilot estimated that the gilder was 50-100m away; the glider operator has not been traced.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted of a report from the Apache pilot, transcripts of the relevant RT frequencies, radar photographs/video recordings, reports from the air traffic controllers involved and reports from the appropriate ATC and operating authorities.

The Board noted that the Apache came into close proximity with the model glider in Class G airspace, just outside the Wattisham MATZ. However, because it was Class G airspace, and providing the model weighed less than 7kgs, the Board also noted that it was equally entitled to be there. The Board were informed that Wattisham ATC had contacted local model flying clubs, with which they had good relations, but that the model glider was not thought to be flying from one of these clubs.

In looking at the actions of the glider operator, some Board members wondered whether the operator should have been able to hear the Apache approaching and could therefore have moved his glider out of the way. However, those with model flying experience thought that, although the operator might well have been able to hear the Apache, with the glider being at 700ft the operator would have needed to keep his eyes on the model in order to control it, and would be unlikely to be able to turn his sight away from the glider to also assess closure rates, geometry and the avoiding action required until the helicopter came into his line of sight. Simply descending the glider without sighting the Apache might equally have caused it to fly into conflict had the Apache been at a lower altitude.

The Board commended the Apache pilot for his good look-out and subsequent avoiding action. Given the fact that the model would not show on radar, nor have any TAS/TCAS equipment on board, the only barrier to avoiding an Airprox with a model such as this was look-out; the Board agreed that it was likely that it had solely been his actions that had averted a collision.

The cause of the Airprox was judged to be a conflict in Class G, resolved by the Apache pilot. The risk was assessed as Category B, avoiding action had been taken by the Apache pilot, but safety was much reduced below the normal.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A conflict in Class G resolved by the Apache pilot.

Degree of Risk: B.