

AIRPROX REPORT No 2011021

Date/Time: 27 Mar 2011 1130Z (Sunday)

Position: 5206N 00050W
(3nm N Milton Keynes)

Airspace: Lon FIR (Class: G)
Reporting Ac Reported Ac

Type: Topsy Belfair Kite

Operator: Civ Pte NK

Alt/FL: 1450ft NK
(QNH 1014mb)

Weather: VMC HAZE NK

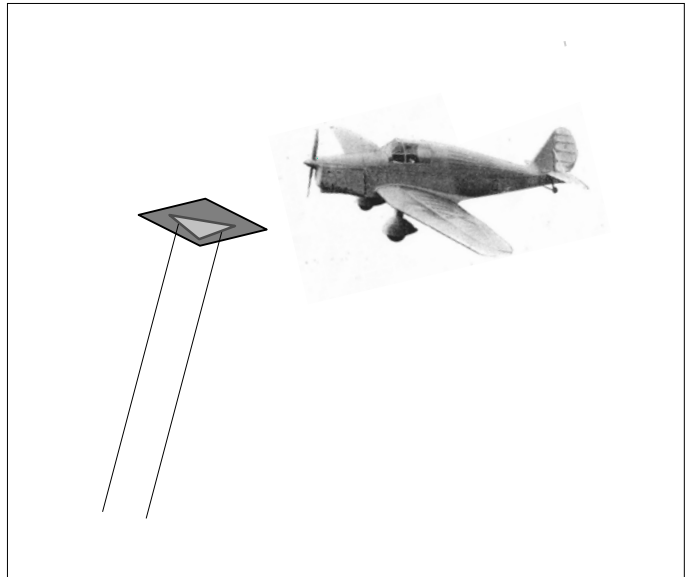
Visibility: 6km NK

Reported Separation:

50ft V/10m H NK

Recorded Separation:

NR



PART A: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO UKAB

THE TIPSY BELFAIR PILOT reports that he was en-route to Turweston on a pleasure flight, heading 250° in the cruise at 95kt in hazy weather and he kept his alt low to aid forward visibility. He was navigating by map, stop watch and compass without GPS or other nav aids.

Just after crossing the M1, he saw what he initially thought to be a large hawk slightly above them and to their left. He was surprised to see a bird so high in the reduced visibility especially as the air was quite smooth with only about an 8kt breeze and no significant thermals to carry a bird to that height. Many years ago when he was learning to fly, he was taught that a hawk can out-maneuvre any aircraft so when encountering one it is unwise to manoeuvre your aircraft as this will confuse the bird and may inadvertently increase the risk of collision. As the 'hawk' passed by about 30ft off his port side and 50ft above, he noticed that it was not a bird, but a kite with strings visible below it; it was much larger than a hawk and delta-shaped (like small flex-wing microlight). It was static and did not change position as he would have expected a bird to do. He was shocked and when clear he turned but could not re-acquire it as he was looking into hazy sun and did not wish to increase the risk of hitting either it or the string by circling.

He could not identify any obvious person or site on the ground, which was open farm land and small villages. He thought that it could have been free flying, blown in wind, and stabilised by strings as he would not expect a tethered kite to fly so high.

Friends in a preceding aircraft flying slightly lower than him, on a similar track about 3min ahead, said they thought they had seen a large hawk flying in the same vicinity and above them and he thought that it might have been the same object.

He observed that there are increasing numbers of NOTAMED kite flying sites but they generally do not state the upper limit of the activity, which he thought might indicate that they are operating above 60m (~200ft) iaw the Rules of the Air; if that is the case he thought that the max height should be included in NOTAMs.

UKAB Note (1): The closest NOTAMED kite flying was 25nm to the W and the subject kite flyer could not be traced.

UKAB Note (2): Neither the Topsy nor the kite showed on recorded radar.

PART B: SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S DISCUSSIONS

Information available consisted solely of a report from the Topsy pilot.

Despite extensive procedural searching it was not possible to trace the kite flyer; further, it was established that the activity was not NOTAMed [although there was a NOTAM for kite activity 25nm further W].

Members agreed that the Topsy pilot had seen the kite as early as feasible and, since he opted not to take any avoidance, they agreed that there had been no risk that the ac would have collided with the kite.

The Board was informed that the ANO restricts the height of kite flying in open FIR to 60m without CAA permission [no record of such permission being granted for a kite in this location and time]. Without doubting the pilot's report, Members expressed surprise that it was feasible to fly a kite at such a high alt.

While noting the Topsy pilot's remarks about maintaining course when confronted by a bird of prey, the GA Member drew attention to the CAA Safety Sense Leaflet 10 which advises pilots to 'attempt to fly above birds in their flightpath' as birds normally descend away from approaching ac. Further, the DAP Advisor pointed out that, where possible, AUS will always include a top height in kite flying NOTAMs; he also advised that kites are often used to train captive birds of prey.

PART C: ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE AND RISK

Cause: A conflict in Class G airspace with an untraced kite.

Degree of Risk: C.