

Before Deep Freeze, Snowy Owl Captured at BWI Marshall Airport, Relocated

Airport Works With USDA Wildlife Services Personnel to Minimize Threats from Snowy Owls, Other Birds

On Friday, December 27, a Snowy Owl was reported on the airfield at Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, near Runway 4-22. A U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services Wildlife Technician stationed at BWI Marshall set a trap for the large bird, which was captured during the night. The Snowy Owl was banded and relocated the next day, well away from BWI Marshall.

In recent months, Snowy Owls have been seen in increasing numbers in Maryland and throughout the eastern United States. The large birds pose a threat to aviation. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) data ranks Snowy Owls among the bird species most likely to cause damage when struck by aircraft. The owls' size, mass, density, and low-flying habits are hazard factors.

“Airlines and airports work hard to help prevent the hazards related to bird strikes,” said Paul J. Wiedefeld, Chief Executive Officer of BWI Marshall. “At BWI Marshall, we take a number of proactive measures to make aviation safer while protecting wildlife.”

BWI Marshall has a comprehensive, integrated program in place to help minimize conflict between birds and aircraft. Two USDA Wildlife Services employees are stationed at BWI Marshall to assist the Airport with this important work.

At BWI Marshall, the emphasis is on proactive measures to deter birds from the Airport. For example, storm-water management facilities are specifically designed to not appeal to birds. The goal is to minimize standing water that could attract waterfowl or other birds. Specific vegetation and landscaping across the Airport property is designed to not attract birds. Other prevention methods can be as simple as utilizing covered trash cans in outdoor areas around the Airport terminal and the public parking facilities.

Beyond the active environmental and planning efforts, numerous prevention methods are used to harass birds away from aircraft operating areas. For example, the Airport uses twelve propane cannons positioned at strategic locations around the airfield. These cannons can be fired remotely to produce a loud noise to frighten birds away from aircraft operating areas. Similarly, USDA Wildlife Services personnel at BWI Marshall use a number of hand-held devices which produce loud noises or bright flashes to deter birds.

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