

Birds Can Invade Your

If you think you're safe from sneaky birds' nests in your aircraft because you fly it every day, and keep it in a hangar overnight, you have another think coming.

John Harwood, CFI at Kapiti Aero Club, says they recently discovered a bird's nest that appeared literally overnight in an aircraft that was hangared.

"A piece of straw hanging out of a Cessna 152 alerted us, and when we looked in deeper, there was a rather large nest inside. No birds, but a very large nest.

"Going flying with that could've ended badly."

John immediately issued a notice to all club members reminding them of the importance of pre-flight checks, and being extra vigilant for birds' nests.

"Even if your aircraft is hangared this is still a danger," reiterates John. "Ours was hangared but they still got in. Any little gap can be filled, they are quite persistent."

Any aircraft can have birds nesting in it. It doesn't matter whether it's a big or small aerodrome, or whether the aircraft is parked in a hangar, or out in the open. Birds can get into surprisingly small spaces. A thorough pre-flight inspection is essential.

Clues

Birds often leave signs they're nesting in your aircraft. Bird droppings on and underneath the aircraft are an obvious sign. You might even hear the chirping of chicks.

Usually, the first indication is vegetation on the ground or snagged on some part of the aircraft. And this can appear between the first flight and later that day!



Plane Overnight

Your inspection should be more than a quick walk around the aircraft. You need to check inside the wings, fuselage, engine cowl, and tailcone.

Any small opening has the potential to allow birds to get in. You should remove as many of the cowls as possible, and perform a thorough inspection, especially if the aircraft hasn't been used for a long while.

Dangers

Birds' nests inside an aircraft pose a very real danger to flight safety in many ways.

If the nest is close to the engine, especially the exhaust system, it could result in a fire. If the nest disrupts the airflow into the engine oil cooler, the engine may overheat and possibly seize.

The electronics can be affected by the bird activity, or the obstruction of the nest.

Nests built in the fuselage or wing can disrupt the control

cables needed to move the rudder, elevator, ailerons, and flaps, leading to jammed controls.

Where there are birds, there are highly acidic bird droppings. If they aren't cleaned out they can corrode metal anywhere on the aircraft.

Prevention

You can do a few things to deter birds from making their home in your aircraft. The most common method is to use bungs to cover the air inlets for the engine. These should be clearly identified with a "remove before flight" ribbon. Always use these, whether your aircraft is stored in a hangar or outside.

But there are other openings that are often overlooked, such as a slot for the elevator control. It's unlikely you will have commercial bungs for this type of space, so you may have to make your own out of foam, or use tape. Again, make sure you identify every gap-stuffer so they will all be removed before flight. ■

This nest appeared overnight in a hangared aircraft at Kapiti Aero Club.

