

TIPS FROM THE NEWBIES



New pilots will often identify issues no longer obvious to more experienced aviators. Here are some tips from the Young Eagles who attended the Flying NZ national championships at North Shore in February 2019.

They have only a few hours flying experience but they bring fresh eyes to an activity where experience doesn't always equal safety.

Ten of the 2019 muster of Young Eagles were at North Shore in February for Flying NZ's national championships. It's a mark of the calibre of this relatively inexperienced group, that some of them beat their higher-hours peers in competitions.

Joseph Allen-Perkins flies at South Canterbury Aero Club. The 18-year old is a 2019 Ross Macpherson Memorial Scholarship winner* and he's accumulated about 50 hours towards his PPL.

"Probably my biggest thing at the moment is building situational awareness. One of the ways I'm trying to do that is really focussing on listening to radio calls while I'm on the ground. As soon as I hear the calls coming in, I start to build a mental picture of where all those aircraft are. »

// From left: Blair Stevenson, Lucy Laby, Gemma Douglas, Adam Hancock, Ben Alexander, Joseph Perkins-Allan, Sam Inskeep, Holly Lyttle, Scott Wright, Heidi Vogel. Photo courtesy of Andrew Lindsay.

* Five or six Ross Macpherson Memorial Scholarships are awarded to Young Eagles each year for flying lessons, underwritten by the CAA, Airways, Avsure and Aspeq.

“When I was at about the 10-15 hour level, I couldn’t do that very well, so it feels great I’m now able to build that skill.

“Even if people are chatting around me, or even to me about something unrelated, I will make sure I’m paying attention to what I’m hearing on the radio.”

Fellow South Canterbury pilot is Lucy Laby – also a 2019 Macpherson scholar. She was runner up in the Jean Batten Memorial Trophy at the championships, open to all student pilots.

As the 17-year old approaches 50 hours, she’s aware she’s entering the so-called ‘death zone’ of 50-350 hours when pilots can feel invincible but lack experience.

“I hope I always feel like I do now – that there is so much to learn,” says Lucy.

“I think things can get dangerous when you feel like you know it all. Even if you get to a point where you already know a lot of what you’re hearing about, there’s always a skill you can learn about or improve on.”

Seventeen-year old Blair Stevenson was overall winner of the 2018 Macpherson scholarship. At the 2019 national champs he was runner-up in the Aero Engine Services competition for basic aerobatics, and third in the junior landing competition of the Wigram Challenge Cup.

Blair emphasises the importance of always getting a complete weather forecast before flying.

“The weather in New Zealand can quickly change from a nice blue sky day to having a front come through without much warning.

“Running into bad weather can quickly upset a good day’s flying,” he says, with understatement.



// At the national champs, the CAA’s Paula Moore gave the Young Eagles a lesson on reading VNCs.

Seventeen-year old Scott Wright is another South Cantabrian pilot and won a Macpherson scholarship in 2018.

He knows from personal experience why a thorough preflight is important.

“I’ve found birds’ nests inside the rudder.”

Scott also prepares for radio comms before he leaves.

“I make sure I know all the radio frequencies I’m going to need. For instance, if I’m doing a cross-country between Timaru and Christchurch, I’m going to be on Timaru, Uncontrolled, Christchurch ATIS, Christchurch Approach, Tower and Ground. That’s a lot of frequency changing and I don’t want to be wondering what I should be on, and where, when I’m concentrating on flying as well.”



// Lucy Laby, from South Canterbury Aero Club, competes in the preflight competition.

Sam Inskeep, from Tauranga, is the 2019 winner of the Kirk Samuel Dakers Memorial Scholarship, sponsored by Nelson Aviation College in memory of one of its instructors.

As he works towards his PPL, the 16-year old keeps the aviation mantra, 'aviation is unforgiving of mistakes', in the forefront of his flying practice.

"It constantly reminds me to regard all aspects of aviation safety as crucial. It simply but vividly shows what could happen if I fail to comply with safety standards."

North Shore Young Eagle Gemma Douglas is also a 2019 Macpherson scholar. The 16-year old is preparing for her first solo, and says one of the things she enjoys most is doing a thorough preflight.

"Someone told me once I should 'take care' of the aircraft, as you would a human. So I treat it almost as if it has a personality. For instance when I do my preflight I always drag my hand across the wings to make sure it has no 'bumps and bruises' – dents and scratches and stuff.

"If it's 'happy' before I fly, it'll treat me well."

// I think, as student pilots, it's our responsibility to make sure we're comfortable with what we've learned, or if we need to put in more time. //

Adam Hancock was part of the Mid Canterbury Aero Club team that triumphed at the national championships. The club team took out both the North Shore Trophy for the club with the most overall points at Nationals, and the prestigious Wigram Challenge Cup for the club team challenge. Adam also won the junior landing event in the Wigram competition.

The 17-year old agrees with Joseph Perkins-Allan about the importance of situational awareness.

"Even if you've carried out every other safety measure, with poor situational awareness, nothing else will matter.

"I practise building situational awareness, not just in the air, but on the ground. I take conscious, deliberate note of what's around me, for instance, as I'm walking through the aerodrome.

"Using my eyes is number one for me."

Eighteen-year old South Cantabrian Holly Lyttle is working towards her CPL. She is the winner of the 2019 Waypoints Aviation Scholarship; and at the championships, of the Newman Cup for precision circuits, open to pilots up to CPL level.

One of the tips Holly has received during her training is that the flight begins the night before departure.

"I think about the choices I make during that evening and the possible impact they'll have on my ability to fly well and safely the next day.

"When I wake up the day of the flight, I think about how much sleep I've had and assess how I'm feeling. I also have a good breakfast, and then make a final decision on whether it's safe for me to fly."

A member of Marlborough Aero Club, 17-year old Ben Alexander is a 2019 Macpherson scholar and aims to get his PPL before he leaves school at the end of the year.

With about 30 hours under his belt, Ben says one of his most important safety tips is using common sense in weather decision-making.

"If I'm second-guessing myself about what I'm flying into, I'll turn back. It's only me who can be honest about whether I'm putting myself and any passengers I carry in the future, at risk."

Heidi Vogel is the overall winner of the 2019 Macpherson scholarship, and at the championships she won the Nola Pickard Memorial Trophy for a series of aviation tests for the Young Eagles.

Flying at South Canterbury, the 16-year old says number one for her is to simply listen – and ask.

"Everyone at the aero club has their own experience and advice to share. I think it's important to be able to adapt to advice, and keep an open mind about flying.

"Also, not to be embarrassed about asking for more practice, or clarification on theory. In aviation, there's no 'fake it till you make it'. Like any skill, people learn at different speeds, and I think, as student pilots, it's our responsibility to make sure we're comfortable with what we've learned, or if we need to put in more time.

"The more comfortable we are in the aircraft, the more likely we will be to quickly recognise potential risks and problems, and to be able to act swiftly and appropriately." ➤