

Model Flying at Beaulieu Airfield

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General observations on Model Flying

Model flying generally:

- is a relatively harmless hobby and recreation,
- is a nationally popular activity, especially among the young and old,
- has a good safety record with few, if any, serious accidents or injuries,
- is represented nationally by a proactive organisation, the British Model Flying Association (BMFA), which has good links to the government, CAA, Royal Aero Club, etc.
- is represented at local level by several thousand clubs which control local activities,
- has over 30,000 members. all covered by appropriate insurance,

Model flying at Beaulieu Airfield:

- Has been done at Beaulieu Airfield since 1955 (when the wartime airfield was decommissioned),
- Has been regulated by the Forestry since 1982, with annual permission and payment, as the only place in the New Forest where model flying is permitted, and is strictly limited to a particular part of Beaulieu Heath.
- The area of the heath licensed for model flying is wholly within the perimeter track of the wartime airfield, and thus is only a minor part of the whole Beaulieu Heath.
- The models flown fall into 3 categories:
 1. ***radio-controlled (R/C) models up to 7kg*** all up weight from the concrete runway at the east end of the wartime east-west runway. This accounts for about 85% of all flying activity. Models take off and land on the concrete runway. There is no need for model operators to enter the heath beyond the runway at any time. Access is usually gained from the (unlocked) Lymington Road gate.
 2. ***free flight models***, largely un-powered and uncontrolled models up to 3kg released mainly from the grass area at the north-west end of the NW-SE crossing runway. This accounts for about 10% of all flying activity. The take-off location is permitted to change depending on prevailing wind conditions. In recovering the models, which drift downwind, it is necessary for the operators to cross some sections of the heath which is done as carefully as possible. Access is usually gained via the (locked) Hawk Hill gate on the Brockenhurst Road.
 3. ***drones (r/c, multi-rotor, stabilised, hovering aerial vehicles)***, have been allowed as a recent trend, on the direction of the Forestry (partly to reduce illegal drone activity elsewhere in the Forest). This accounts for about 5% of activity. There is no need for the drone operator to depart from the take-off point. Drone flying does not fit well with traditional model flying but has been accommodated and regulated. Access is as per other R/C activity.

The Beaulieu Model Flying Committee (BMFC) is designated by the Forestry as the single point of contact for all model flying administration. The BMFC:

- issues permits to individuals (not clubs) for individual activity. Individuals must be insured (BMFA) and registered (CAA) and have a basic competence qualification (from CAA or BMFA).
- runs the national achievement scheme defined by the BMFA locally. A third of permit holders have a good competence qualification and a fifth have an advanced qualification.

- provides the services of a nationally qualified instructor and examiner.
- maintains a list of all permit holders names and contact details and regularly informs permit holders of news (by newsletters and notices on an internet website),
- monitors noise levels produced by model flying, and enforces the nationally accepted noise limits,
- liaises with local Air Traffic control over matters which could interact with full-size flying, such as height limits, which are regularly monitored.

Since the last Nature England Review in 2015 the BMFC has:

- significantly reduced the noise nuisance of model aircraft engines by encouraging a transition to electric motors rather than combustion engines. In 2015 electric motors were only 40% of those used, now they are about 80%.
- significantly reduced pollution from oils and fuel (as for noise).
- established an internet based information and registration service which enables all model flyers to be consulted and informed much more frequently than previously.
- managed the limited access periods when gate closures have been in operation.
- encouraged an increased level of competence by giving training and examination.
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Advantages to the Forestry of flying at Beaulieu

- Model Flying is a licensed activity and as such pays a significant annual cash fee.
- Model flying activities only takes place on fine weather days during the year (except for closures due to pony drifts, access maintenance and other exceptional conditions). It is thus a useful presence of responsible people at a regular site, possibly dissuading illegal activities,
- Individuals attend only when they are ready (are available, have suitable model prepared, etc.) and are therefore present only in small numbers at any one time, typically less than a dozen, never more than a couple of dozen at any one time.
- There are no organised "events" such as competitions, jamborees, shows, etc. so that the numbers present at any one time are never large,
- Incidents which are potentially dangerous or disruptive are regularly reported, such as illegal off-road vehicle use (e.g. trail bikes on the runway), camping, dogs out of control, etc. The points of reporting are the permissions officer (Queen's House), the local Keeper (Stockley Cottage) and the Hampshire Police.
- Litter collection is regularly carried out to ensure that the car-park and airfield are safe (against unwanted Foreign Object Detritus, FOD, dangerous to flying) and discarded rubbish from the general public. Forestry organised litter collection events are always supported.
- The car park and runway are regularly checked for quality of access including tidying up the barrier, clearing stock generated droppings in the operating area, etc.,

Disadvantages to the Forestry of Model Flying at Beaulieu Airfield

- Model flying creates a certain amount of activity at the site and therefore represents a pressure on the environment. It should be noted that this is not as great as the pressure created by dog walkers throughout the year, and tourists during the summer.
- Removing the permission to fly models at Beaulieu Airfield by the disbandment of the BMFC would end the annual licence fee income, and might precipitate uncontrolled and allow other possibly illegal activity.

- There has been some friction between the dog-walking community and the model flying community in the past. This is usually related to the unrestricted movement of dogs not on leads causing commotion.
- The presence of model flyers has sometimes encouraged other unlicensed potential users of the heath on the grounds that "if model flying is OK then why not X ? " where X has been motor-biking, kite flying, rocketry, car racing, etc. This has always been dissuaded when possible.

Issues for discussion between the BMFC and the Forestry

A. Closure of the entire heath during the bird nesting season. This has occurred recently in 2018 and 2020 in particular. The presence of models flying is considered by some to deter ground nesting birds during the ground nesting season. The BMFC view is:

1. Ground nesting birds should be protected. The main threat to the success of ground nesting appears to be dog walkers penetrating the entire heath. Dogs off-lead have been observed chasing birds and exploring vegetation over a wide area.
 2. R/C Model flying does not require people to enter the heath beyond the runway. The threat to ground nesting by movement of model flyers is therefore very small,
 3. The area allowed for models to fly over is strictly limited (about 0.5 sq miles) of the total heath (about 40 sq miles) and thus about 1% of the heath in area. Any danger to nesting birds is extremely limited.
 4. Some bird experts in the past have considered that the presence of model flying is analogous to the presence of raptors such as buzzards, kestrels and hawks, which are regularly seen flying over the heath. and thus presents no additional threat to ground nesting.
 5. Limited access to the heath has been agreed during periods of restriction (vehicle access via the Hawkhill gate while the Lymington road gate is closed) and this has proved very successful in restricting general public access while permitting some model flying.
- **The BMFC therefore recommends:**
 1. That model flying during the bird nesting season should NOT be restricted, but that public access should be controlled by closing the Lymington Road gate and allowing restricted access via the Hawkhill gate for model flyers only.
 2. That this access be trialled for 5 years, starting in 2021.
 3. That the concession be included in the annual permissions document.

B. Restriction of Free Flight during the bird nesting season.

It is possible that this might be of use. It should be discussed,

C. Restriction on the use of Drones.

While drone flying is considered a genuine example of model flying by the BMFA it does not mix well with traditional activities at Beaulieu. Possible restrictions should be discussed.