

Airprox report number 2023085

EuroFox pilot reports A400M as a drone

The UKAB have published airprox report 2023085 detailing an event at 10:02hrs on 20th May 2023. The pilot of a EuroFox light aircraft reported that whilst flying straight and level at 2800ft close to the M4 Junction 24 they encountered a drone that flew over their left wing. The object was described as black, round or slightly elliptical and approximately 50cm in diameter. They also noted that the drone made a whirring or whooshing sound. UKAB have classified this as *'a situation where providence had played a major part in the incident and/or a definite risk of collision had existed.'*

Analysis by Airprox Reality Check of ADS-B data reveals that at the time and location reported, the reporting aircraft EuroFox G-CJZD was travelling East at about 80knots when Airbus A400M ZM408, travelling South at about 200knots, performed a 180^o turn towards them, starting about six miles in front, and closing to about three miles. At that distance the A400M would appear about the size of a large, very close drone.

From the cabin of a EuroFox in flight here is no possibility of hearing 'a whirring or whooshing noise' emanating from any known drone. All multicopter drones are electric powered and nearly silent. The A400M does make a very loud 'whooshing noise' that possibly could penetrate the EuroFox cabin.

The reporting pilot stated that the object was black. A400M ZM408 is grey with a black nose cone, and black when viewed in silhouette. The turning banked course of the A400M and the forward speed of the EuroFox would have produced a constantly changing aspect, making identification particularly difficult. During the A400M turn the closing speed would have reached 280knots.

It is an indisputable fact that the A400M turned in front of the reporting aircraft. There is no evidence to support the claim that any drone was present. If the pilot's report had stated 'between us and the A400M' or 'just after the A400M turned in front' or something similar then it would be possible to imagine that two 'objects' (a drone and a A400M) passed in front of the reporting EuroFox within seconds of each other. But this is not the case. (In fact, the pilot has confirmed that only one 'unusual encounter' occurred during this phase of the flight – so either the pilot saw a drone but failed to notice the A400M, or saw the A400M and 'identified' it as a very close drone.) The reasonable conclusion is that the distant A400M was misidentified as being a nearby drone, and that there was never any risk of a collision.





Actual a/c

Airprox Reality Check believe that the majority of drone airproxes published by UKAB are wrong, and are in fact cases of distant full-sized aircraft being misidentified as nearby drones in fleeting encounters by startled pilots. Psychologists specialising in human visual perception have explained that in the sky, humans have none of the cues they use on the ground to judge size and distance, making such errors commonplace.