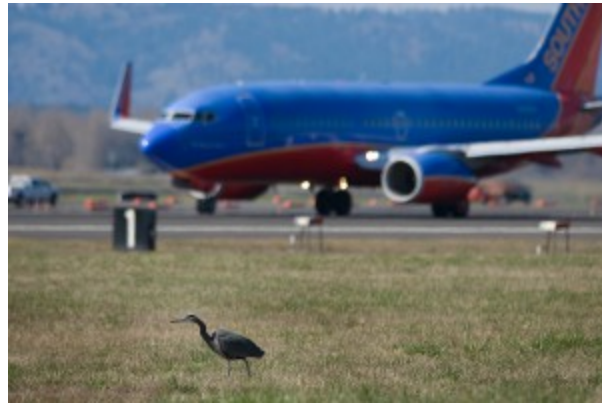


Nick Atwell: Forest Path Leads to Career Path for Wildlife Manager

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How does Portland International Airport keep wildlife away from the runways? Find out from Nick Atwell, who runs our airport wildlife hazard management program, and learn the unusual pathway that led him here.

How would you describe your job to a first grader?

I work at airports making sure that airplanes and wildlife don't collide with each other. The goal is to keep everyone safe.

What's the coolest part of your job?

Being part of a team of professionals that enjoy their jobs and the unpredictability of each day.

How does PDX wildlife management work?

We approach wildlife management from a science-based perspective, and focus on non-lethal measures whenever possible. Procedures include scaring birds away from the airfield with horns and noise cannons, and trapping and relocating some large birds like hawks and owls. We manage the habitat to reduce food sources on the airfield that might attract birds and other wildlife, and do research and development – including testing various forms of wildlife deterrents. We stay in touch with wildlife experts internationally, as well as within our own community, to make sure we use appropriate measures.

What should everyone know about PDX wildlife management?

Our program is a model nationally and recently won the Federal Aviation Administration award for wildlife strike reporting, which is a credit to the entire wildlife management team. We have a solid team with diverse backgrounds, but we all graduated from the same program at Mt. Hood Community College and were interns at PDX prior to being hired in our current jobs.

What's one thing about you that would surprise people?

I was a part of USA Diving, working out at University of Michigan doing both springboard and platform diving. That was a long time ago, but the memories of the painful learning curve on platform are still very clear. I'll never forget bleeding through my skin after hitting the water so hard while learning a new dive and having my coach tell me to get back up there and do it again, and again, and again.

What did you want to be when you were growing up?

A professional mountain biker and snowboarder, but I broke too many bones to maintain that career path.

How did you land this job?

I started school back in Michigan and moved west to pursue racing. I spent most of my days in the forest and decided that I needed to understand more about the environment, so I entered Mt. Hood's natural resources/wildlife program. A program requirement was to complete one term of work experience. So, I applied for the wildlife student position here in 1998. I didn't know it at the time, but this was the start of an exciting career path.