

# A NEW HAZARD – BIRD-SCARING LASERS

A GCH Aviation pilot was blasted by a laser in August 2020 while flying above Canterbury. It's the second time the pilot has seen laser beams sweeping the sky there.



**P**ilots who fly in rural areas need be aware of the possibility of farmers now using bird-scaring laser technology.

A helicopter pilot was dazzled by laser beams emanating from an Ashburton grain shed during the evening of 16 August 2020.

“It lasted about 10 seconds,” says Matthew Boulcott, pilot for GCH Aviation. “I didn’t experience the worst effects I know a laser strike can have, but the sudden blast of glare affected my vision and was definitely a distraction.”

Matthew says it’s the second time he’s seen laser beams sweeping the airspace above Canterbury, although the first occurrence was far enough away to have no effect on him.

Acting head of aviation safety at the CAA, Dean Winter, says laser strikes are an increasing hazard to pilots.

“The number of laser strikes reported to the CAA has been growing since 2015. In August of that year, there were eight; in August 2020, there were 26.

“While, in this instance, the laser strike seems inadvertent, it does illustrate the care with which farmers must deploy laser technology.”

In this case, the coordinates noted by the pilot led police officers to the farmer concerned, who was using laser beams to scare birds away from stored grain.

Some of the laser beams were escaping the open bay of the grain shed.

After, as the police report notes drily, “education was given”, the farmer was apologetic for the potential tragedy they had unwittingly created.

If you experience a laser strike, report it to the CAA so we can alert pilots to any trends.

Look for form CAA800 *Laser beam exposure questionnaire* on [aviation.govt.nz/forms](https://aviation.govt.nz/forms). ➔

## // LASER BEAM EXPOSURE

Direct eye exposure to a laser beam can result in momentary flash 'blindness', where visual interference persists after the laser beam is removed. There can be 'after-images' left in the visual field after the light is gone.

And, as with anything startling, it can be disruptive to the pilots' decision-making; it can completely disorient them, or even incapacitate them.

// Laser beam technology is now being used to scare birds away from grain stores.