

# FEATURE



**Left:** Coal chases cattle egrets away from the flightline here. Border collies like Coal are used to control the number of birds entering Charleston AFB airfields.

**Below:** Coal takes a break after pursuing fowl that feed in the open fields along the flightline.



Photos by Airman 1<sup>st</sup> Class Tyrone Pearsall

## C-17's best friend

### Border collies help protect aircraft

**Story and graphic by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Bryan Lewis**  
437 AW Public Affairs

It's a bird. It's a plane. No, it's...a border collie?

Every day, a team of five well-trained border collies search the flightline here for birds in danger of damaging aircraft.

Fowl, such as blackbirds, seagulls and egrets, can't resist coming to the open fields of the flightline to nest and feed.

"The open fields are perfect because it makes it easy for the birds to find bugs," said Rebecca Ryan, Flyaway Farm and Kennels owner, who has been contracted for bird wildlife control on base.

With the arrival of birds comes the danger of one being ingested in an aircraft engine. However, thanks to border collies like Kim and Coal, Charleston AFB airfields have a unique team to help control wildlife.

"Kim and Coal see it as a job, and they love it," said Mrs. Ryan. "They don't have the monotonous job of herding cows or sheep, which allows them to have a good time while protecting the local aircraft."

The border collies are trained on real birds in the field. They aren't trained on sheep or domestic ducks. The result is a dog that thoroughly knows the job of working with birds, said Mrs. Ryan.

"The birds see our dogs as a predator," said

Colette DeGarady, the contractor's wildlife biologist. "We have already seen a large change in the birds. They are much more nervous now."

Fowl that are being chased see the dogs as a

wolf or coyote. Knowing the dogs as predators, the birds associate them with the area, making this bird-control technique a long-term tactic, said Ms. Degarady.

The work the dogs do is not only fun for them, but safe for the birds as well. Border collies do not have a kill instinct. Working the wildlife, not harming it, is their intent.

"I like using the dogs to control the wildlife," Ms. DeGarady said. "It is a natural remedy."

Bird control is needed every day, all day, to assure flightline safety. Border collies are just part of the whole process to govern the wildlife.

"We brought in Flyaway Farm and Kennels due to their expertise in handling bird wildlife hazards," said Lt. Col. Adam McMillan, 437<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Safety chief. "The border collies are part of the whole team of wildlife control experts."

Along with the dogs, the contractor employs wildlife professionals who have the best intentions for wildlife in mind. Other tactics employed include cutting high foliage to remove feeding areas, reducing standing water and monitoring the birds' migratory patterns.

Fortunately, the border collies don't know this. They view themselves as the heroes of wildlife control, said Mrs. Ryan.

"This is a sunrise to sunset position," said Ms. DeGarady. "Our dogs know that and work extremely hard."

