THE WORLD’S COOLEST AIRPORT EMPLOYEE IS A RUNWAY PATROL DOG NAMED PIPER

News / Personalities

Birds and other wildlife are notorious for causing problems at airports, often known to fly over runways and strike aircraft. But one Michigan airport has discovered the most adorable of solutions: a border collie named Piper who patrols runways in a ski mask and boots.

In late 2014, Traverse City’s Cherry Capital Airport brought Piper aboard as its new K-9 unit, designated to seek out and chase away the birds that sometimes congregate at the airport. Federal regulations require all airports to have a plan to fend away wildlife, mostly using methods like pyrotechnics, traps, and sirens. Butas Mlive reported last year, Piper’s owner and trainer Brian Edwards—an airport operations supervisor—saw potential in the seven-year-old border collie to contribute. He’s now the only Wildlife Control K-9 on staff at an airport in Michigan, the airport claims, and one of only a handful in the United States.

Piper the Cherry Capital Airport K-9 dog

Courtesy of Airportk9.org

The Cherry Capital Airport’s operations director Dan Sal told Mlive that Piper has been better than

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pyrotechnics at keeping wildlife away since the snowy owls he chases “seem to remember” him and stay away. “Though rare, dogs are one of the most effective methods of wildlife mitigation at airports,” the airport writes on its website, noting that it’s perhaps the most proactive of approaches. Piper’s list of duties include responding to reports of wildlife on the airfield and chasing them off, checking the airport’s perimeter fence for holes, and conducting routine patrols to keep away rodents and small animals that attract birds to the airfield. He works four 10-hour shifts a week (with “plenty of breaks” during those shifts).

Piper the Cherry Capital Airport K-9 dog

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Courtesy of Airportk9.org

And now with his own Instagram account, Facebook page, and website, Piper has captured the hearts of Redditors and dog lovers around the world thanks to his amazing abilities to look cool wearing safety goggles and to stand tall amid the loud noises of the runway. Edwards explains on the K-9 team’s website that he trained Piper to get used to aircraft noise—and that Piper wears

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earmuffs designed especially for dogs to keep his ears safe.

Unfortunately, even with the proper protection, guarding an airport runway is a dangerous job. The Daily Mail reports that Piper suffered a fracture late last year while chasing a snowy owl on the taxiway and was temporarily reassigned to Chief Morale Officer while in a cast. Now, though, it looks like he might be getting back to work soon: Piper's Instagram account announced yesterday that his cast has been removed and he is starting the road to recovery. So keep Piper in both your thoughts and your Instagram feed.

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