

# Skills – Flying with others

*By Judith Mole*

This is the first in a series of skills articles, covering various aspects of flying, which we hope will become a regular feature in the Flyer. This time, the topic is flying with others.

Many people initially find it intimidating flying with others in close proximity and require a lot of space. The red streamer system was developed so that other air users could identify easily those who might need more room and may fly a little more erratically due to their low air time. Similarly, there are many experienced pilots whose tolerance for flying in crowds is low. As our sites become more crowded, it is important to make sure everyone flies considerately and safely to avoid accidents and bad feeling on the hill. Most of this is common sense, but here is a reminder of some basic ground rules on flying with others.

## Rules of the air

The rules of the air are designed to make flying behaviour more predictable. Make sure you remember these rules and if you have forgotten them... here's a quick summary of the key points:

- 1) When two aircraft going in roughly the same direction converge at approximately the same altitude, the one with the other on its right gives way.
- 2) When approaching head on, both aircraft should alter course to the right.
- 3) When ridge soaring, and two aircraft are approaching head on, the one with the ridge on their left should give way - because the person with the ridge on their right might find it difficult to break right without hitting the hill.
- 4) When overtaking, alter course to the right to overtake it.
- 5) An aircraft which is landing or on final approach has right of way over all other aircraft in the area.
- 6) The lowest aircraft on any approach to landing has right of way, so long as they are not obstructing or cutting across others on final approach or landing.

## Flying with other aircraft

Paragliders and hang gliders have different launching, flying and landing characteristics. It's important to be aware of these when flying together. Talk to HG/PG pilots to become aware of their needs so you can both fly safely together.

## Don't hang around launch/landing area

Many of our sites are long ridges and there is no need to hang around the launch/landing area. Soaring back and forth in front of launch/landing areas stops others from getting in the air and means their window for getting off is short, possibly increasing already high stress levels. Similarly, a pilot soaring in front of launch narrows the space for an easy top/slope landing. Getting away from the launch area

gives you more space from others, meaning you are not with the crowds. If it's scratchy top/slope land and walk back or take off again where you are.

## Thermalling with others

It is an accepted rule that a glider established in a 360° turn in a thermal has right of way over those joining the thermal. They will also not usually break right. If you don't wish to enter the thermal as well, then turn away or fly around that pilot (giving them loads of space, and preferably passing them on the upwind side. If you find the thermal, check in all directions before you turn that there is no one in close proximity to you. If you enter a thermal with others already established in it, remember the following rules:

- 1) Gliders joining a thermal should give way to those already established in it.
- 2) You must circle in the same direction as the pilot(s) already established in the thermal.
- 3) If people are thermalling in different directions, turn in the same direction as the nearest glider to you (vertical separation).
- 4) The approach to enter the thermal should be flown in a tangent to the circle so you can maintain visual contact with all pilots in the thermal and so that no pilot in the thermal has to move to take avoiding action.
- 5) Don't cut inside of someone when turning in a thermal.
- 6) If you leave the thermal, check around you first to make sure you are exiting into clear air and are not obstructing other pilots following you in the turn.

It is a joint responsibility in all cases to avoid a mid-air; however it is particularly prudent for pilots who are thermalling to be aware that another glider climbing quickly in the thermal from below, may not have sighted you. This may mean that either or both pilots take the correct avoidance action. It's all down to lookout, take avoiding action if you are at all unsure that you have been seen, but follow the thermalling etiquette to enable all pilots to climb quickly and safely. It is also important to not fly under or above another pilot, as a sudden deflation, thermal gust or dive could cause a mid air. The most important thing is move your head - look around constantly - if your head isn't moving every few seconds then you are at risk.

## Flying too close

Don't fly too close to others. Passing in front of others closely can cause turbulence which can cause a canopy to collapse. Also each pilot has their own comfort zone when flying in close proximity to others. Respect that personal space, and unless you know the other pilot well, leave plenty of room.

## Ground handling

If you want to do some ground handling, choose an area of the hill where you are not obstructing others. For example, check out where the top landing area for hang gliders is (may be in a completely different area than where you would land a PG), and don't

ground handle there. Hang gliders may only get one chance to top land. You ground handling could make them lose that chance.

## Keeping a lookout

Making sure you always look out for other pilots is something which is reiterated in school all the time, but it is worth saying here again. Many pilots do not check that the air is clear before launching, especially when reverse launching a paraglider. You may plan to turn around, hold the canopy above your head and then check to see if the air is clear, but if you get lifted off your feet this may be too late. Look first, then inflate your canopy!

When keeping a look out in flight, don't just check that you are passing on the right, if that means boxing someone else in. Check that the person who is flying towards you doesn't have to fly too close to the hill or other obstacles to pass you. And finally - ALWAYS look before you turn.

## Flying along the ridge

When flying with others, especially in scratchy conditions, try to fly in a way that will allow both/all of you a chance to top/slope land (including hang gliders!). This means not turning inside someone just so you can hog the lift and make them turn in sink, or pushing them out of the lift progressively on each beat whilst you have the ridge on your inside.

## Landing approaches

Make your intention to land obvious by flying a proper landing approach, flying to the top landing area in a clear fashion. If you are going to land, then do so as quickly as is safely possible - mincing about half landing just gets in the way of others and can cause an obstruction. Plan your approach so that if you overshoot, you don't fly straight into others!

## After landing

After landing, clear the area so your equipment doesn't obstruct others. In particular do not leave your kit in a place where hang gliders could be landing. When packing up, move to the edge of the field, so you and your equipment is out of everyone's way.

## Incidents and how to resolve them

It is the responsibility of ALL pilots to avoid accidents. Seniority at a site in terms of hours/experience/years in a club doesn't give you extra rights. If everyone flies considerately, with regard to their own and other's safety then there should be no incidents, but in case there are, it is useful to alert the others in the air of your concerns by shouting out. Please don't make this an expletive filled diatribe, not

least, because non-flyers (such as tourists, or visitors, or people living in the houses below) can often hear what is being shouted from the air). Just a 'Look out!' or 'I need more space!' is usually sufficient.

Talking to the other pilot after you have landed is essential; they may not have been aware of you or the potential incident, may have different tolerance levels for flying in close proximity; not have been aware that you were trying to land, etc. When talking to others it's useful if this is done in a constructive manner, so everyone learns something and can fly more safely in future. Pilots in the past have given up the sport because they got shouted at on the ground - it would be a shame not to support them to fly more safely and enjoyably with others.

A lot more info is available in the pilot handbook, available from the BHPA.