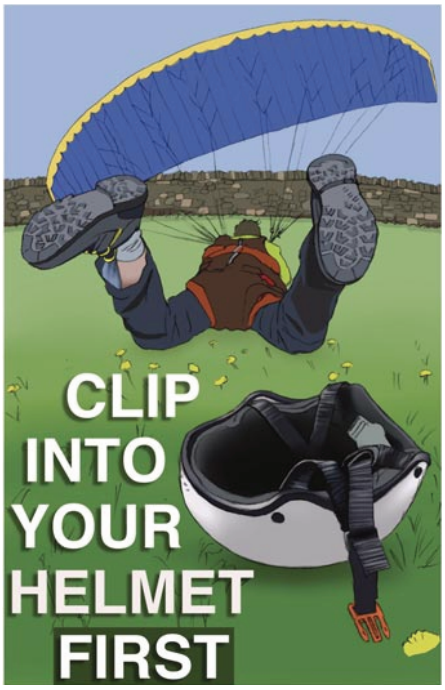
Sun glare and aerial collision avoidance

In the autumn and winter periods, the short daylight hours and low angle of the sun above the horizon can be a significant glare hazard to pilots. On a bright day, gliders flying with the low sun behind them may be invisible to pilots approaching them head-on at similar altitude, flying directly towards the sun.

On hill sites, ridge soaring gliders are often flying at a similar height to one another. Pilots flying a beat into the sun's glare may be unable to see wings approaching them on the opposite beat with the sun directly behind them. If a pilot is unable to observe an approaching glider, the convention that a glider with the ridge on its left gives way to one with the ridge on its right can be very difficult to adhere to.

All pilots are reminded to take into account the additional hazard posed by glare, and the significant contributory factor the low sun plays in issues of visibility – and thus the risk of a mid air collision. In these conditions the pilot of another craft may not be aware of your presence or proximity. Do not presume that an approaching pilot will give way to you – you may not have been seen. Ultimately, it remains every pilot's responsibility to avoid a collision with another aircraft.



Cold, wave, etc.

During the winter the layoff between flying days is longer, and the urge to fly on any seemingly suitable day can sometimes override pilots' safety thresholds. Flying during the winter months brings with it several potential hazards not necessarily encountered by new CPs during their summer flights.

The particular meteorological conditions giving rise to wave can exist at any time of the year, but in many UK areas wave conditions are more prevalent in the colder months. The tell-tale lenticular clouds perpendicular to the wind are not always present in wave conditions. Low airtime pilots may be lulled into a false sense of security by light winds on take-off, and therefore be unprepared for big height gains in very cold air, or severe turbulence when the wave is out of phase with the hill.

Low airtime pilots are recommended to read the Winter Flying advice in the Site Conditions and Meteorology section of the online Pilot Development Structure (https://bhpa-pds.com/home/skills/foundation-winter-flying).

Coaching clubs occasionally run excellent sessions on identifying and flying safely in wave conditions; pilots are strongly recommended to improve their knowledge of this phenomenon. It can lead to smooth and extraordinary height gains for some, and bumpy, terrifying rides for others.