

Gopher at one hundred and fifty feet.

On the May 22, 1988, First Officer **Bill Wickett** and I were departing Calgary. We were heavy, and it was warm. Combined with the altitude of Calgary which was over 3,500 feet, it meant a long and high speed take off run.

Our departure was to the North. It seemed to take forever to gain momentum. Finally, with the end of the runway approaching, and at an enormous ground speed, the moment to rotate arrived. As I rotated the B-737 into a flying attitude, my visual direction shifted from the runway, and caught sight of a hawk.

It was flying from left to right. The hawk, no doubt, was surprised at this machine leaving the ground and climbing into its domain. As we lifted off, with the nosewheel still thrumming from its high revolutions, I could see that this was going to be a "*Close Encounter of the Bird Kind.*"

The hawk now hastened to clear the path we were on. At about 150 feet, I banked to the left to pass behind the frantic bird. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the hawk flash past the right side of the plane. I had hoped to lift the right wing over the bird.

"Did we miss him?" I asked. A bird strike in our situation would have been serious, and most serious, had the bird gone in the engine. "Yes, the bird went over the top of the wing, and the gopher he dropped, went under our wing", said Bill.

Once we had completed our departure operations, and were settled in the climb to altitude, I said " Do you mean to say that the hawk had a gopher in its claws, and let go at the last second, so it could gain enough height to clear our wing?"

It turned out that this was the case. We both burst out laughing. Had we hit the gopher, we could picture the headlines, "*Jet collides with gopher in the air!*"

We were still laughing in-cruise. "Did you happen to see the expression on the gopher's face" I asked. The F/O replied he had, and put on a wide-eyed look of terror, as a demonstration. What were the last minutes of the ground squirrel's life like, we wondered. Perhaps, he had survived the fall. What would he tell his wife when he returned?

"Sorry dear, I didn't get the groceries. You see, I was on the way, when suddenly there was this whoosh, and then I felt claws in my back. The next moment, I was high in the air (and you know how I hate heights).

This was it, I thought, I was dinner. Then, the next minute I heard this roar, and saw this huge noisy object bearing down on us. My poor back, as the hawk scrambled to avoid this monster. I closed my eyes, then everything happened at once. Suddenly, I was falling.

That bush next to the Gooperoo's burrow saved me, and here I am, back two minutes after I left. Now how was your day?"