

Solar drone lands after record 14 days aloft

July 24 2010



Technicians clean a QinetiQ Aerostar Tactical UAV unmanned drone at the Farnborough International Airshow in Hampshire, southern England, on July 22, 2010. The company has tested a solar-powered drone, keeping it in the air for two weeks before landing it on Saturday. It set the record for the longest unmanned flight.

An ultra-light unmanned aircraft powered by solar energy and designed for military surveillance landed after two weeks aloft and setting a record for the longest unmanned flight, its manufacturer said.

The British-based defense technology firm QinetiQ said its 22.5-meter (74-foot) long Zephyr, weighing just 50 kilos (110 pounds), finally touched down in the Arizona desert 14 days and 21 minutes after it took off from the US Army's Yuma Proving Ground.

"It was airborne for 14 days and 21 minutes," company spokeswoman

Claire Scotter said from London.

"We await the FAI (World Air Sports Federation) official confirmation of the world records," she said.

The flight, which according to local newspaper the Yuma Sun saw the craft climb to 70,000 feet (21,200 meters), shattered the unofficial world record for the longest duration unmanned flight of 82 hours by the same aircraft in 2008.

Last week when it broke the record, the company said it had set out to create "the world's first truly eternal plane, capable of providing a low-cost, persistent surveillance capability over months rather than days."

"Potential applications include [earth observation](#) and communications relay in support of a range of defense, security and commercial requirements," it said.

The latest model of the carbon-fiber Zephyr is around 50 percent bigger than earlier versions, giving it more space for its [lithium batteries](#). The batteries are charged by the sun and their accumulated energy allow it to continue flying at night.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), also known as drones, are set to play a growing role in combat. They are already being used by NATO forces in Afghanistan for intelligence-gathering but also increasingly in an offensive role, carrying out strike missions on enemy targets.

The vital role that UAVs are playing was highlighted earlier this week at Farnborough air show outside London, where companies such as US defense group [Northrop Grumman](#) said the unmanned aircraft sector could soar to sales of 3.5 billion dollars in the next decade.

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Citation: Solar drone lands after record 14 days aloft (2010, July 24) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-07-solar-drone-days-aloft.html>

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