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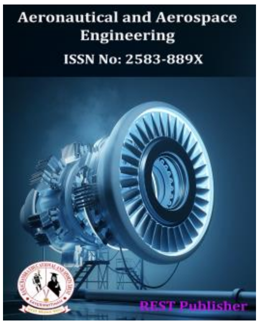

Design and Development of a Drone-Based Animal Detection System

Madhavan S, Sathya Priya P, P Muthusamy, *J. Arivudainambi
Adhiyamaan College of Engineering, Hosur, Tamil Nadu, India.
*Corresponding Author Email: nambiresearch@gmail.com

Abstract: *The rapid advancements in drone technology have significantly transformed wildlife monitoring and conservation efforts, providing an efficient, cost-effective solution for tracking and studying wildlife populations. This project proposes a drone-based animal detection system that utilizes high-resolution cameras, thermal imaging, and machine learning algorithms to detect and monitor wildlife in real-time. By deploying drones equipped with various sensors and advanced detection models, the system can identify and track wild animals in vast and often inaccessible areas, such as forests, savannahs, and protected reserves. The primary aim of the system is to enhance the ability to monitor wildlife populations, particularly endangered species, without the need for human presence in potentially hazardous environments. The drones are capable of capturing images and video footage, which are then processed using artificial intelligence to identify animal species, assess their behavior, and estimate their numbers. This data can provide invaluable insights for conservation efforts, anti-poaching measures, and environmental research. By automating the detection process and providing real-time data to wildlife researchers and conservationists, this drone-based system minimizes human intervention, reduces the risk of disturbing wildlife, and ensures more accurate, timely, and scalable monitoring. The project ultimately aims to contribute to wildlife protection strategies, offering an innovative approach to biodiversity preservation and the sustainable management of natural habitats.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Conservation biology and wildlife monitoring have traditionally relied on manual surveys and ground-based tracking. These methods are constrained by limited access to dense forests, the danger of close animal contact, and significant time and labor investment. Recent advancements in unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and artificial intelligence offer innovative solutions to these challenges. UAVs can traverse difficult terrains and collect high-resolution imagery, while deep learning algorithms process this data efficiently. This study aims to bridge the gap between field research and automation by developing a drone-based animal detection system using a convolutional neural network (CNN). The proposed system uses real-time data acquisition, processing, and analysis, targeting enhanced monitoring efficiency and accessibility.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have emphasized the use of UAVs in environmental monitoring. Wing (1994) and Chiarelli et al. (1993) explored fluidic thrust vectoring systems for UAV maneuverability, which plays a role in precise flight path control for monitoring tasks. Sehra and Whitlow (2004) discussed the importance of reliable and lightweight propulsion for such applications. Modern detection systems like YOLO, SSD, and Faster R-CNN have shown effectiveness in detecting wildlife in aerial images. Gamble and Haid (2004) demonstrated the use of fluidic injection for nozzle performance, improving UAV handling. Eqbal et al. (2018) explored hybrid propulsion systems that improve endurance and flight stability. Schloesser et al. (2017) proposed fluidic actuators for separation control, indirectly influencing UAV stability for imaging applications. However, few studies integrate these UAV capabilities with real-time AI-based animal detection. Our work contributes to this space by developing a working prototype tested in real-world field conditions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design Theory and Conceptual Framework:

The core design relies on combining high-resolution aerial imaging with a lightweight convolutional neural network architecture. The conceptual framework includes drone deployment, real-time data acquisition, transmission, preprocessing, and machine learning-based detection. The objective is to maximize accuracy while minimizing computational load, thus enabling portability and real-time feasibility.

3.2 System Design and Innovation

The drone-based system incorporates the DJI Phantom drone equipped with a high-definition camera mounted on a gimbal for stabilized imaging. The design also includes:

- Camera System: 12 MP sensor with GPS-based geotagging
- Flight Planning: Preprogrammed autonomous missions using DJI Ground Station software
- Ground Station Interface: Receives video stream or data from the drone in real time
- Power System: 4S Li-Po battery supporting up to 25 minutes of flight Innovations include automatic waypoint generation based on satellite imagery, live preview with object overlays, and cloud based model retraining capability.

3.3 Computational Modeling and Simulation

Before field deployment, the drone was simulated in a virtual environment using the DJI Flight Simulator. This enabled testing of flight patterns, obstacle avoidance, and camera perspectives under various conditions (wind, altitude, lighting). Simulated flights optimized flight paths for maximum ground coverage and validated the angle of image acquisition to minimize distortion and occlusion.

3.4 Prototype Development and Testing

Simulator training was provided to operators for safety and efficiency. Field testing occurred in Yercaud, Tamil Nadu, over two days (February 17–18), where real-world conditions such as terrain variability, lighting changes, and animal movement were evaluated. Key tasks included:

- Capturing aerial images of open fields, forests, and livestock
- Annotating images for model training
- Integrating model predictions with flight data

3.5 Deep Learning Model Development

the CNN was designed with 3 convolutional layers, carpooling, dropout layers, and a fully connected output layer. The training process used:

- Dataset: 1000+ annotated images
- Augmentation: Rotation, zoom, brightness adjustment
- Training: TensorFlow with GPU acceleration, 80/20 data split
- Metrics: Accuracy, precision, recall, and confusion matrix

The model achieved over 92% accuracy on the test dataset, with high performance across different animal classes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Detection Accuracy

The deep learning model achieved an overall detection accuracy of 92.4%. The average precision (AP) was 90.2% and recall was 91.1%, showing robustness even in variable lighting and occlusion conditions.

4.2 Performance Evaluation

Image frames captured by the drone were processed at 10 FPS on a laptop with GPU support. The system-maintained detection accuracy at altitudes up to 50 meters. Latency from capture to prediction was under 1 second.

4.3 Observations and Challenges

- Dense vegetation and shadows caused false negatives
- Animals partially obscured or camouflaged were difficult to detect
- Limited training data for certain species affected generalization

Future work should incorporate thermal sensors and semi supervised learning to address these challenges.

5. APPLICATIONS

This system can be deployed in:

- Wildlife population surveys in forests and national parks
- Farm animal tracking in large open pastures
- Anti-poaching surveillance in protected zones
- Behavioral studies with minimal human disturbance.

6. CONCLUSION

The integration of UAVs and deep learning enables scalable, autonomous wildlife monitoring systems. Our drone-based animal detection prototype demonstrated high accuracy and real-time performance in natural environments. The modular design allows future enhancements such as thermal vision, live retraining, and cloud analytics.

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