

## Solar Powered Airplane Sets UAV Records

by Susan DeFreitas, January 6th, 2011

The Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) has confirmed that the solar-powered Zephyr, the U.K.'s own high altitude long endurance (HALE) unmanned air vehicle (UAV) has broken not one, not two, but three world's records, giving it the nickname, "the eternal plane."

According to Treehugger, this unique UAV by QinetiQ, modeled on an ultralight and equipped with very long thin film solar panel wings, has stayed aloft for all of 336 hours, 22 minutes and eight seconds, a record for flight time of these types of planes. (This smashes the previous record, set by Northrop Grumman's Global Hawk in 2001, according to the BBC, by a factor of 11). The Zephyr has also broken records for flight duration for a UAV of its class (unmanned craft weighing 50-500kg), and an altitude record for a UAV of its class (21,562m/70,741ft).

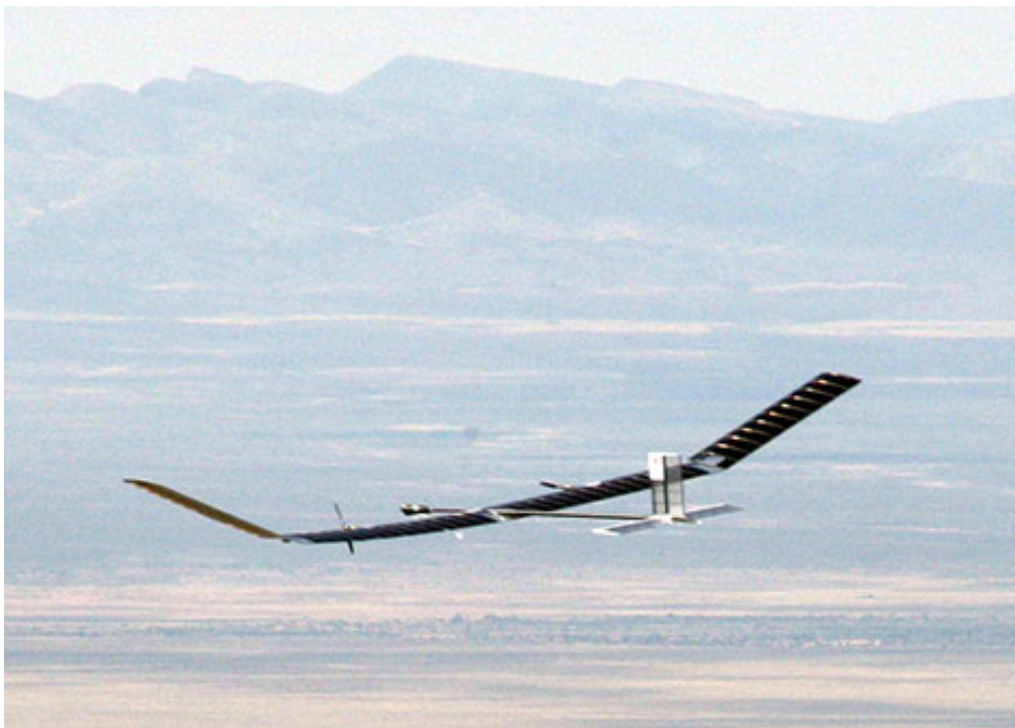


image via Treehugger

QinetiQ's chief designer Chris Kelleher sees applications for this plane in areas where long-term air surveillance can be key—in spotting Somali pirates, for example, or tracking the spread of forest fires. The Zephyr can cruise aloft for nearly half a month at a time, using solar power to recharge its onboard lithium-sulphur batteries during the day.

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