

# STOP FLAPPING AND RIDE YOUR THERMALS

BY DEWITT JONES

## STEP OUT, CATCH THE UPDRAFT, THEN SOAR.

Staggering day, any way you look at it.

And what a way to look at it: standing on the north side of Molokai, Hawaii, atop the world's highest sea cliffs, gazing across the azure Pacific, feeling so alive I can hardly contain myself.

The unkempt grass of the pasture marches on a few feet beyond where my own are planted. The grass quivers there at the cliff edge, blown by stiff winds from below. I take a step closer. The edge seems to pull me. I can feel its intensity. Trembling, I take another step...

Whoa! From out of nowhere an apparition. So startling, I almost stumble backward. Wait, it's not an apparition; it's real. A frigate bird, its huge black wings, motionless, rising like a Harrier jet straight up from below the cliff edge, levitating into my consciousness. For one breathless moment the bird's gaze meets my own. Then the wind sweeps him higher. Another bird takes his place, then another, and another, until seven have soared past me. All in silence. All without a beat of their wings. All without effort, rising on the invisible turbulence beneath them.

Higher and higher they soar on that indiscernible funnel of air. Did I say indiscernible? Not for them. I watch the subtle movements of their wings.

Never a full stroke, simply tiny adjustments to bring them back to the place of maximum lift. Higher and higher...without struggle.

