WHY PELICANS GLIDE

SOME OF THE NEWS FROM HARBOR ISLAND NATURALLY

BY JOHN ALBERT

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GETTING A LIFT FROM THE BEACH

ALMOST EVERYTHING AN ANIMAL DOES HAS A REASON

GOING LOW SAVES ENERGY.

The upper photograph shows a pelican gliding just above the surface of our beach. It is not looking for fish. Pelicans fly high to find their prey. The bird is taking advantage of "ground effect,"

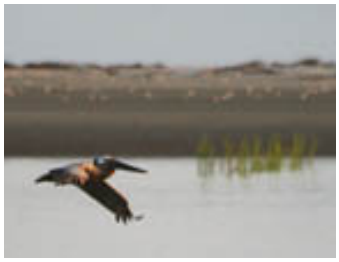
Air that flows over the wing travels farther and faster than air going under the wing. As the air speeds up it drops in pressure. The pressure is lower where air is moving faster, above the wing. This lower pressure causes "lift," the force that off sets the birds weight. Thus the air is pushed

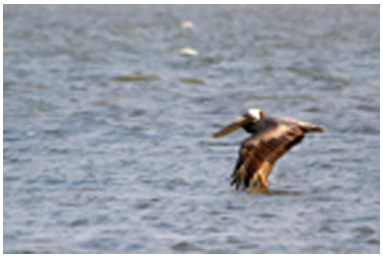
down, behind the wing. Birds experience this at any altitude, but close to the surface air is trapped beneath the wing. The trapped air slows down and results in higher pressure, that also produces lift.

There is another reason for the pelican to glide low over the beach. Flying so low the tips of the wings do not move as much as when the bird is higher. This reduces the amount of energy expended.

Next time you see a flock of pelicans gliding by low to the water with wings curved down remember that they are saving energy.

Sources: The Birder's Handbook by Paul Ehrlich, National Geographic Field Guide to Birds of North America 4th ed.





All photographs are by John Albert

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