

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

THE WISE BUZZARDS

The fact that a mass of cumulus or "woolpack" cloud is the visible capital of an invisible column of rising air is a discovery of modern times, but it might have been suspected ages ago if somebody had drawn obvious conclusions from an attentive observation of the soaring of birds. Prof. G.S. Dodds, of West Virginia University, writes in Science of watching a number of turkey buzzards soaring one hot afternoon last summer. They approached from the north at a height of about 500 feet.

"Not far from the observer," he says, "they came underneath one of the scattered cumulus clouds present at the time and at once discontinued their flight toward the south and began to soar in circles, keeping directly beneath the cloud. During this circling, with wings still held stationary, they rapidly gained elevation, so that the course of each bird became a spiral. This upward spiral soaring flight continued for some minutes until the birds had become hardly visible, when they resumed their southward course at a much greater elevation than before they had come underneath the cloud. A few minutes later a second flock of about a dozen came along from the north and under the same cloud gained elevation, as the first flock had done. This is evidently a case where the birds made use of the upward air current beneath the cumulus cloud to gain elevation without resorting to wing strokes, and the writer has been wondering whether this is a matter of common observation."

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