

# SAUCER OVER MICHIGAN

by HAROLD DREW

I suppose that most of us are inclined to be skeptical on the subject of "Unidentified Flying Objects" (UFO) until one is sighted. In the summer of 1963, while flying out of Big Bear, Mich., I saw one.

I released after take off in a well defined thermal and was climbing steadily, glancing around, now and then, expecting, perhaps, a fellow member to come in and share my thermal, when I spotted the UFO. My eyes were riveted to it for two or three seconds until it disappeared under my wing.

I did lot of quick thinking in the next 180 before it came again into view. Here was the traditional saucer with the lens shaped cabin at the center; true, it was quite a ways off although at my altitude; neither could I distinguish the characteristic inclined windows and I had seen nothing more than an outline. May be it would not be in sight when I came around again. Could I succeed in resisting the urge to embellish? I had pretty much decided that I could not

when the UFO came into my view once more. This time, I could take a longer and a more dispassionate look. Doubts began to assail me.

The body of a heron, seen in profile, might easily appear to be lens shaped. Its legs, trailing behind, could be taken for one rim of the saucer, while the outstretched neck for the other. However, I have never seen a heron fly with the neck extended, nor have I ever seen the bird in soaring flight.

The third time around left me with a few more doubts. I could distinguish the bulge formed by the head and I thought that I spotted a slight wing movement. I decided to head for the bird next time around but my decision came too late. I did not see my friend again.

On one sunny morning, while in New York, we drove out to the New York Zoological park in the Bronx and sought out Mr. J. Bell, Assistant Curator of Birds. He listened patiently to my story. Mr. Bell believed that the bird was a crane, probably a Sand Hill Crane.

These birds, he told us, stick their necks out in flight, are not unknown in Michigan and are reputed to soar, at least on ridge lift. He directed me to an open air aviary where a pair formed a part of the collection. The cranes were pinioned of course so they were not seen in flight but, bearing in mind Mr. Bell's description of their flight attitude, one of their species could have been easily my UFO.

I also took the opportunity to talk to Mr. Bell of the migratory habits of the birds we call Chicken Hawks in Michigan. He thought that these would be the Broad Winged Hawks which are common in Michigan.

During the fall of 1962, I completed a modest goal flight from Big Bear to Marion, Ohio, County Airport. En route I was working the usual highly perfumed thermals triggered by the Miami River refinery at Toledo. I looked up and found myself surrounded by perhaps 400 or 500 hawks. We climbed together to about 3,000 feet at which altitude one or two leaders peeled off and headed downwind. The others followed immediately. Their course was about southeast while mine was more southerly so that I soon lost them. However, for as long as I could see them, they were in a gliding flight, presumably at their best glide angle.

After listening to my story, Mr. Bell was a little vague about the use of regular thermaling technique by birds when migrating in flocks, nor had he ever seen so large a flock of hawks as described by me. He did say, however, that birds frequently use ridge lift when migrating in flocks.

A few weeks after this experience, Chuck Kohls of the Toledo Glider Club, came over to Big Bear so that we could try out winch launches with his Ka-7. He told me of an exactly parallel incident which occurred to him about the same time.

I suggested to Mr. Bell that he should buy a sailplane instead of spending all his time with field glasses on the ground. Birds which rely on thermaling technique for migrating are presumably forced to skirt the Great Lakes and I would think that an ornithologist with a sailplane could learn a great deal if he operates in the Toledo area at times when soaring birds are wont to migrate.

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