

# Story: Soar Loser

May 19, 2024

Acts 2:1-21

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

The koa'e kea is a distinctive bird, with its bright white wings and body set off with deep black feathers, and that amazing long trailing tail. It's distinctive, but it's not unique to Hawai'i Island or to the Hawaiian Islands. You'll find white-tailed tropicbirds (to use their English name) flying above and feeding in the warm waters of both the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and even the Atlantic Ocean. Although they fish for food in the sea, some of them like to nest on the cliffs of Kilauea. Quite a few of them like to relax by soaring on thermals. That's the warm air that rises from the black rock of the volcano summit.

One day a visitor to the islands who was knowledgeable about birds was standing at the crater rim and saw the koa'e kea soaring on the thermals. "Look at that," he said to someone standing nearby. "Those are white-tailed tropicbirds, and they're quite a ways inland. How odd for a seabird."

"And it's even stranger," said his equally knowledgeable companion. "They're soaring. White-tailed tropicbirds don't soar."

"It's very odd indeed," agreed that man and that woman, and they went on to talk about something else.

I'm sure such conversations happen often at those overlooks, but I suspect that more often nobody comments on these things at all. And it is true that koa'e kea don't soar very much in other places in the world. They're strong, agile fliers, to be sure, but most white-tailed tropicbirds don't live where there are steady, reliable rising thermals.

So this wouldn't have mattered if a koa'e kea hadn't overheard, and become very concerned, that by soaring on thermals she was doing The Wrong Thing.

So she stopped.

Oh, she'd still fly around the summit craters, and she wasn't so silly as to leave her nice spot on the cliffside. But when she flew she beat her wings quickly and steadily, the way she flew in all the other places she went.

And nobody noticed.

I suppose it wasn't that big of a difference to spot, but her family didn't, her husband didn't, her friends didn't. Maybe they thought she had somewhere urgent to go. I don't know.

It was a really young koa'e kea, one who'd been flying for less than a month, who said something.

"Why don't you soar?" she asked one warm afternoon after they'd returned from successful fishing in the ocean.

"White-tailed tropicbirds don't," she said in reply, beating her wings in steady time.

They flew side-by-side over the summit for a while, and the younger one looked at other koa'e kea soaring nearby.

"It looks to me like they soar," she said.

"They don't soar in other places in the world," said the older one, maintaining her wingbeats. "I heard some people discussing it, and people would know."

"OK," said the youngster. "But those birds are there. We're here. I think we can do things differently here."

The older one said nothing. She just flew along. Until, in a minute or two, her wingbeats stopped, and she held them out straight and firm.

Side by side, the young bird and the older bird soared.

*by Eric Anderson*