

Burnaby NewsLeader

Lost swans get a lift



Lani Sheldon, of the Wildlife Rescue Association, checks on the two swans they'll soon be releasing to a flock in Delta.

Mario Bartel photo

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The young tundra swan just couldn't keep up with her family as they flew south for the winter, eventually leaving her alone, lost and hungry.

The female bird likely wouldn't have survived its first winter if not for a couple who found her in rough shape in the Cold Lake area of Alberta in early October.

They took her to a veterinarian who diagnosed her as being underweight with a broken wing.

It appears now her loneliness will be cured too.

The swan, about six months old, is at the Wildlife Rescue Association's facilities at Burnaby Lake after a month recuperating at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton, followed by a free lift from Air Canada to Vancouver.

There it joined a young male tundra swan which had been found wandering the streets of downtown Victoria, also lost and hungry. He was eventually rescued by the BC SPCA's

Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre on Vancouver Island, which brought him to Burnaby by ferry.

Lani Sheldon of the Wildlife Rescue Association said it's likely the young swans simply weren't strong enough to keep up with the rest of their flocks during the migration south from Alaska and the Yukon.

“What happens is the flock doesn't sort of stop and wait for them. As they fly, the lakes are freezing behind them. So by the time this bird [from Edmonton] was ready to go and looking really well, all the lakes and all the habitat in the Edmonton area was frozen so there were no swans left in that area. So she did have to hitchhike a ride west.”

Such swans don't usually survive when left on their own, Sheldon said. “If you ever see a swan alone it's very, very unusual. They feel very exposed and they're more vulnerable to predators.”

The plan is to release the pair—known as 2730 and 2726, their spots in the long list of birds that have been taken in by the Burnaby facility this year—as early as next week, to join flocks of tundra swans currently overwintering in either the Delta or Mission-Chilliwack areas.

In the meantime, the pair are hanging out together at the Burnaby rehab facility, getting acclimatized to the outdoors again and gaining weight.

They're too young to mate, but they seem to be bonding, forming a friendship out of circumstance. “They definitely stick together.”

- Anyone wanting to make a donation towards the swans' care is asked to call 604-526-2747 or visit www.wildliferescue.ca. Noting that the female weighs five kilograms, Sheldon said, “These guys eat a lot of food.”

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