

Swan looks for ride west

Injured bird healthy after local rehab stint

BY HANNEKE BROOYMANS, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM DECEMBER 2, 2009



An injured swan at the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton's shelter in southwest Edmonton.

Photograph by: Larry Wong, edmontonjournal.com

EDMONTON — A tundra swan that got left behind in the annual migration is looking for a free flight to Vancouver.

The swan arrived at a local shelter with a fractured wing that is now healed. It can't stay at the shelter for the winter, though.

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton treated the swan and has it swimming in their pool right now, but generally these birds don't do well in captivity, said Cheryl Feldstein, the society's executive director. They want to send it to the West Coast, where a number of its kind overwinter.

The swan was brought to the shelter by a couple from Cold Lake, who found it near the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. They kept it for 10 days, not sure where they could bring it. Eventually, they heard about the rehabilitation society and brought it in on Oct. 16.

Ideally, injured birds are brought in as soon as possible, Feldstein said. That's because broken bones could begin to set in incorrect positions without veterinary guidance.

This particular tundra swan had a fractured left wing. It was also dehydrated and underweight, at just 3.5 kilograms. It's not possible to tell just by looking at it if the bird is male or female, but a male adult would normally weigh 7.5 kg and a female 6.3 kg. This is a juvenile bird, born this year. Feldstein said they've brought its weight up to 4.9 kg.

She said she'd really like to get it out of the shelter as soon as possible, now that it's healthy. Although the swan is feisty and appears to be doing well, swans don't normally do well in captivity. The shelter gets a number in during the year, and generally they don't survive, she said. Sometimes they come in very emaciated and beyond help. Another contributing factor could be lead poisoning, a common cause of death for everything from waterfowl to eagles during hunting season.

The non-profit society is hoping a carrier that can provide a space in a heated cargo hold will step forward to fly the bird to Vancouver. The bird would be transported inside a modified, padded dog carrier.

Feldstein said they've got the Fish and Wildlife permit ready and the Wildlife Rescue Association of B.C. will be at the other end to pick it up, do a check on it and then release it.

"If someone gave us the green light, we could go today or tomorrow. And the sooner the better, because they start to go a little nutty in captivity after a while, to put it nicely. Anybody would, if they were used to being outside. But they can get quite depressed and stop eating. They're very high-stress animals."

A direct flight would be ideal, because it would limit the length of the stressful situation.

Releasing the bird in Alberta right now would kill it. It's too cold, Feldstein said.

The society was able to release another type of swan, a trumpeter, about a month ago on Big Lake.

Feldstein hopes the tundra swan will successfully overwinter on the coast.

"Hopefully, it will find a nice group of swans that will accept it."

There are about 140,000 tundra swans and 16,000 trumpeter swans in North America, according to the Canadian Wildlife Service.

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