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Injured rare bird beats the odds

By QMI Agency

CALGARY – After beating the odds, a rare injured bird grounded in Calgary while her counterparts migrated elsewhere is in need of some wings, but not the feathered kind.

An American bittern, found emaciated and injured in a Midnapore backyard last month, has made a full recovery at the Alberta Institute for Wildlife Conservation (AIWC), just north of Calgary, and now needs to travel via plane to Vancouver.

The bird needs to get to the west coast where she can live in a natural environment through the winter.

Dianne Wittner, biologist and AIWC founder, said the bird — part of a species deemed "sensitive" in Alberta — was likely struck by a car or flew into a power line as she was heading out of Calgary.

She was found Oct. 19 with a fractured radius and ulna in her left wing and a fractured toe.

She weighed just 470 grams, well below the average bittern weight of 650-850 grams.

"We could tell she'd been on the ground for awhile because she was so thin and the fractures weren't fresh," said Wittner.

The bird was treated at AIWC and is now fully recovered, weighing 750 grams.

But she missed the migration period, which sees bitterns fly from Canadian wetlands to either the west coast, southern U.S. or Central America in late September and early October.

However, caring for the bird has cost AIWC, a charitable organization, up to \$2,000 over five weeks.

And because bitterns— part of the heron family— are high-stress birds and do not survive well in captivity, AIWC began looking at other options.

Transporting her across international borders is illegal, but AIWC has been in touch with the Wildlife Rescue Association of B.C. which agreed to take the bird to a spot off the southwest coast where bitterns can feed year round.

But the organization is now tasked with finding the money to build the bird a custom carrier and fly her to Vancouver.

AIWC will keep the bird for now, but because her diet of feeder fish and mice costs the organization up to \$30 per a day, it's not in its budget to care for her long-term.

Anyone interested in sponsoring the bird is asked to call AIWC at 403-946-2361.

jenna.mcmurray@sunmedia.ca