



MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rare Bird Requires Medical Treatment at Wildlife Rescue

A bird rarely encountered off our coast has been receiving treatment for frostbite and other ailments at the Wildlife Rescue Association of BC (WRA) in Burnaby for the past week.

A member of the public found a weakened immature Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) in White Rock. This time of year Brown Pelicans are typically found along the coast of Central California south to Colombia.

Likely a victim of the inclement weather of recent weeks, the Brown Pelican was extremely thin and suffering from frostbite. It had possibly traveled northward following fish stocks and was blown off course by a storm.

Because of poor weather and road conditions the finder was not immediately able to bring the pelican to WRA for help. The Surrey SPCA picked up and transferred the pelican to the Burnaby SPCA, where it was held overnight until a WRA volunteer could retrieve it.

Upon arrival at our facility the pelican's legs were swollen and spongy indicating frostbite. It was extremely dehydrated, severely underweight, hypothermic (suffering from lowered body temperature) and hypoglycemic (abnormally low level of glucose in the blood). The pelican was placed in intensive care by WRA rehabilitation staff.

It is the first Brown Pelican that WRA staff has treated (in 27 years of existence). Care of the pelican has been challenging because of its compromised condition and unusual housing requirements.

During its first few days in care the pelican was carefully rehydrated by tube-feeding fluids at regular intervals. As well, it was given supplemental vitamins and amino acids. The pelican was put on "emaciation protocol", where calories were gradually reintroduced to the diet to ensure that the pelican was able to digest them. The pelican was also given a course of strong antibiotics to prevent infection from developing in the affected tissues and pain medication to help alleviate any discomfort.

The pelican is currently being housed on a warm salt-water pool during the day, and in a large pen overnight. Although it is still battling with swelling and blisters from the frostbite the pelican is alert and eating well on its own. Its weight and body temperature have stabilized and staff are hopeful that it will make a complete recovery.

Over the next few days WRA Animal Care Team Leader, Jackie Ward, will work to obtain the necessary Canadian and US permits for exportation of the Brown Pelican to another rehabilitation centre in California, where the pelican may be released back to the wild.

The Wildlife Rescue Association of BC, a not-for-profit wildlife rehabilitation society located next to Burnaby Lake at 5216 Glencarin Drive. If you find an animal in distress or are interested in volunteering call 604-526-7275 or visit their website at www.wildliferescue.ca.



Facts about Brown Pelicans

1. Brown Pelicans are large, dark waterbirds that feed on fish and some marine invertebrates. They can eat as much as 2 kilograms (4 lbs) of fish per day.
2. Brown Pelicans are rarely seen along the coast of British Columbia. They occasionally come to this area following breeding season, and then migrate to central California or northern South America for the winter.
3. Brown Pelicans are the only pelicans known to “plunge-dive”. After sighting fish from the air (as far away as 20 metres) they dive into the water head first. Using their massive pouch as a fishing net they scoop up as much as 12 litres of fish and water. The excess water is squeezed out and the fish are swallowed. As the pelican dives air sacs beneath the skin help to cushion the impact and help the pelican surface.
4. Pesticide poisoning, especially by DDT, has historically caused severe declines in Brown Pelican populations. The ban on DDT resulted in a population recovery and Brown Pelican numbers are now stable or increasing in most areas.
5. Other birds such as gulls will try to steal fish from the pelican’s pouch. Some will be as bold as to perch on the pelican’s head waiting for an opportune moment to grab their catch.
6. Brown Pelicans are the smallest members of the pelican family. They are approximately 1 – 1.37 metres tall, 2 – 5 kg in weight and have a 2 metre wingspan.