

Frostbitten birds pass through area  
Eleven of 25 pelicans later euthanized, others recovering at Delaware facility  
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courtesyPhoto Photo by - Kim Steininger



Fourteen immature brown pelicans arrived at Tri-State Bird Rescue and Research in Newark, Del., last week suffering from frostbite and hypothermia. The birds were part of a group of 25 that made a brief stop at a Frederick wildlife center after they were found in icy waters in Southern Maryland and Virginia.

FREDERICK -- Twenty-five frostbitten brown pelicans came to Frederick last week before they were sent to a bird rescue in Delaware.

Eleven of the birds were euthanized en route to Tri-State Bird Rescue and

Research Society in Newark, Del., but the other 14 are recovering and may be sent for more rehabilitation in Florida. Brown pelicans cannot survive Maryland winters.

The birds came to Frederick because Di Conger, who operates Last Chance Wildlife Center in Thurmont, said she could keep healthy birds in heated quarters.

"The day before they were to come to me the decision was made for the birds to go to Tri-State," Conger said. She said the birds needed veterinary care, which would be available in Delaware.

"My set-up would not be adequate," she said. Still, the birds were trucked to Frederick, where they were loaded onto another truck bound for Delaware.

All the birds had frostbitten feet, Conger said. The birds were rescued three weeks ago from icy waters in Southern Maryland and Virginia. Wildlife watchers spotted them along the Potomac River, the Chesapeake Bay and the Rappahannock River.

"Pelicans breed in Maryland, but as the seasons change, they go south," Conger said. "This year I suspect (they didn't) because we had a late fall."

All but one of the birds were juveniles born last summer, she said.

"For whatever reason, whether it was people feeding them, they did not go, and the Arctic weather came along and they got themselves in trouble," Conger said.

Pelicans need warm estuaries to survive and catch fish. They are friendly, social birds. They breed along estuaries of Southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore.

Rescuers rounded up the birds and housed them at a heated greenhouse in Montross, Va. There, greenhouse owners Gary and Janice Hutt fed them fish with antibiotics and kept them moist with an irrigation system. The birds were then loaded into a donated U-Haul to be trucked 150 miles to Frederick.

Last Wednesday, at about 4:30 in the afternoon, the birds arrived at Frederick County Animal Control. Wendy Fox, director of Pelican Harbor Seabird Station in Miami, accompanied the birds, Conger said. Eventually the birds may go to Pelican Harbor if they recover.

Chris Motoyoshi, executive director of Tri-State Bird Rescue, said the birds that were euthanized had lost one or both feet to frostbite. "If the tissue is such that they lose a foot, they can't survive in the wild," she said.

Wildlife biologists treating the birds had decided the ones that couldn't survive in the wild would need to be put down, she said. All of the birds suffered, she said. "Most of the birds may have lost a toe or a little bit of webbing," she said. They were also a bit thin.

The birds are being kept mostly inside, although they go out for short periods where they can bathe in heated pools. "If they can't be transported, they'll stay until April or May, and we will release them," Motoyoshi said.

Harold Domer, director of Frederick County Animal Control, said he was happy to provide the pelicans a place where they could be transferred out of the public eye.

"We often come across migratory birds, and even though that's not our role, Di Conger has been beneficial for us, so we were happy to do something for her," he said.

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2 comments

February 27, 2007 @ 10:45 AM: quigley\_brown

Just looking at these social birds I want to give them all a big hug. I'm really glad they're getting taken care of.

February 28, 2007 @ 08:02 PM: kim

Great story! The name of the photographer is Kim Steininger not courtesy Photo though!