

Rare Warm Weather Lands Pink Pelicans in Siberia

November 17, 2010



Zoo officials holding pink pelicans at an aviary in Barnaul in the Altai region. The birds were migrating to Africa. **Andrei Kasprishin**

BARNAUL — A flock of African pink pelicans en route home astounded Siberians by landing in the Altai region after Russia's abnormally warm weather threw them off course.

"I left home early in the morning and what a sight!" said Vladimir Pyagin, a resident of the small village of Suslovo.

"When I got closer, I immediately realized they were pelicans. ... Everybody in the village started trying to catch them to save the exhausted birds from the dogs," he said Tuesday.

Residents managed to capture four of the exotic birds, which have been moved to a zoo in the regional capital, Barnaul, 200 kilometers northeast of the village. The remaining three of the added flock took flight.

Russia's Bird Conservation Union said the birds were migrating back to their native Africa

from neighboring Kazakhstan.

"This is a unique case. Some reports suggest pelicans last flew here over 100 years ago," said union head Alexei Ebel.

Russia is breaking records for abnormally warm November weather, with temperatures in Altai hovering around 5 degrees Celsius. In other parts of the country, there have been reports of bears and hedgehogs delaying hibernation.

The Barnaul zoo director said the pelicans would remain in the zoo out of fear that the birds would not survive the upcoming winter.

"We're not yet talking about letting the pelicans go free. ... We have already prepared a heated aviary for them, and in the spring we'll build a pond," he said.

He added that the zoo would seek advice on how to care for their "unusual guests" from the Moscow Zoo, but in the meantime the birds were being treated to an expensive diet of pike, perch and carp.

Barely 1 year old, the lost pelicans still sport fledgling gray feathers. Only later will their back plumage turn into their more famous pink hues.

"They just lost their way and went in exactly the opposite direction: Instead of Africa they somehow chose the Altai region," the zoo director said.

Click [here](#) to watch a video of unseasonably warm November weather in the capital by Moscow Times staff photographer Vladimir Filonov.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/11/17/rare-warm-weather-lands-pink-pelicans-in-siberia-a305>