

Elsa The Overwintering Pelican

Facebook Postings
in Alberta Birds

John Reasbeck



Preface

Elsa spent the last winter at Frank Lake, Alberta. She spent the previous winter there too. She was injured—no one knows how. But she could not fly well enough to migrate with the other pelicans.

Let's back up a bit. What and who is Elsa? Elsa is an American white pelican. I began calling the pelican Elsa, when a friend of mine, Jeanne Burnham, commented that she thought of the pelican as having that name—from the name of one of the main characters in the movie, *Frozen*. We have no idea as to Elsa's gender. But, it just seemed to Jeanne, and to me, that the name, Elsa, and the female gender, were fitting.

I wasn't paying any attention to Elsa in 2020. In fact, with the COVID-19 virus rampaging through countries around the world, I decided to minimize going out anywhere. I didn't go to Frank Lake, where Elsa was trying to survive, all through the winter. I didn't even know that she was there until I finally paid a visit to Frank Lake in March 2021. In early April, after other pelicans had returned from their southern winter retreats, I soon lost track of Elsa.

In November 2021, when I decided to walk from the locked gate at Frank Lake into the conservation area, I saw that there was again a lone pelican there. There were also several double-crested cormorants. None of those birds should have still been there, because they usually migrate south in October or November. The pelican was having some trouble flying, and one of the cormorants was not able to fly at all.

I took many photos of the pelican we now call Elsa. I took a few photos of the cormorants too. I posted some of my photos, as I've posted other bird photos, in the Facebook group, Alberta Birds. It was soon evident that hundreds of Alberta Birds members were interested in reading my stories about the lone pelican—as well they seemed to enjoy viewing my photos of our encounters. I was curious about how the pelican would fare, as it became colder. I decided that I would begin to regularly monitor and report on how the pelican was doing. I wondered about the cormorant too, when it became clear that the two of them would have to tough it out together in a Frank Lake winter.

Elsa, as Jeanne and I called her, seemed to be able to do what she needed to do to survive. There were fish in the lake, and I knew that there would continue to be open water even when it got very cold. A pipeline, with streams from the Highwood River, the nearby Cargill plant, and the High River Wastewater facility, flow continuously into that part of the lake. Elsa was able to snuggle into her feathers on a protective island.

I decided that the cormorant should have a name too. I thought of the movie, *Casablanca*, in which a woman named Ilsa implored a bar pianist named Sam to play "As Time Goes By." Sam seemed to be a fitting name for the cormorant. He appeared to be doing OK initially. But it became clear as winter took hold that he could not employ the survival measures that Elsa had at her disposal. Instead of snuggling into his feathers, he would usually stand straight up—and try to flap his wings, ineffectually. He had fish and protection from most predators, but he wasn't able to fly at all, and he couldn't keep warm the way that Elsa could. Unfortunately, Sam couldn't be found one day.

Elsa kept doing what she needed to do, month after month. And I continued to check on her and her environment several times a week. Every day I went, it was necessary to walk about 15 minutes on a gravel road and another 10 minutes or so across a field. In good weather, that's not much of a problem. But, as winter progressed, it became more and more difficult to continue with my visits.

I had to continue, because many Alberta Birds members relied on my reporting of how Elsa was doing. And I felt compelled to offer her encouragement from the sidelines, and I felt that I needed to report my visits to see Elsa to our members. When she went missing for several days, it hit me and Elsa's followers quite hard. I understood from Greg Wagner, the Caretaker for Frank Lake, that Elsa vanished suddenly during the previous winter too. He said that he had seen her then at another part of the lake, well away from the island. I noticed that the ice had reached the island where Elsa had felt safe. So, I reasoned that she was probably just hiding out, where she felt safer. And she probably returned to do some fishing at some point early in the day, and then she left as soon as her hunger had been satisfied. I never did see her in her hiding place, but she returned to the island when it got warmer and the ice receded.

Elsa was frequently joined by many other birds, even on the coldest days. Canada geese, mallards, and goldeneye ducks were frequent visitors to the spa of open water at Frank Lake. In March many gulls came to the area—initially, there were California gulls, followed by ring-billed gulls. Then in early April, another pelican arrived. And, soon after that, many more pelicans came. I continued to visit Elsa. My visits were made easier because the gate was unlocked at the beginning of April. I identified Elsa from time to time. Then, toward the end of April, I lost track of her, since the hundreds of other pelicans made her hard to find.

There was an Avian Influenza outbreak, which began to kill some of the birds at Frank Lake and many other areas in Alberta and elsewhere. I asked anyone who saw a dead pelican to tell me if they saw a mating bump on the dead pelican's bill. All of them had mating bumps, which Elsa hadn't had. So, if Elsa hadn't succumbed to the flu, where might she have gone? She had been able to fly better and better through the winter. There's no way of knowing for sure, but I've imagined that she left with some of the other pelicans to go to a nesting colony.

I take photos whenever I see pelicans at Frank Lake. But I've not spotted Elsa since April.

I wrote many stories over the winter describing my visits and how Elsa was doing. And I took many photos. Several members of Alberta Birds encouraged me to collect and preserve those memories. I decided to do that with this compilation of my posts about Elsa through the winter. Initially, I thought that I would place this collection of stories and photos on my website. I might write more about Elsa, pelicans, or other birds at Frank Lake. But I thought that this compilation of my Facebook posts about Elsa would be a good starting point, and it should bring back some memories for members of Facebook/Alberta Birds.

John Reasbeck
July 2022

Table of Contents

Preface 1

November 20, 2021 6

November 20, 2021 7

November 20, 2021 9

November 26, 2021 10

November 27, 2021 12

November 30, 2021 14

November 30, 2021 16

December 1, 2021 17

December 2, 2021 20

December 3, 2021 22

December 4, 2021 23

December 7, 2021 25

December 9, 2021 28

December 9, 2021 31

December 11, 2021 32

December 12, 2021 35

December 14, 2021 37

December 15, 2021 39

December 18, 2021 41

December 19, 2021 43

December 19, 2021 44

December 22, 2021 45

December 23, 2021 46

December 25, 2021 48

December 28, 2021 50

December 31, 2021 51

January 1, 2022 53

January 2, 2022 55

January 6, 2022 56

January 10, 2022 58

January 11, 2022 60

January 13, 2022 61

January 14, 2022 63

January 16, 2022 66
January 17, 2022 69
January 19, 2022 71
January 22, 2022 72
January 24, 2022 74
January 26, 2022 77
January 29, 2022 79
January 30, 2022 81
February 1, 2022 82
February 3, 2022 83
February 7, 2022 86
February 9, 2022 88
February 11, 2022 91
February 13, 2022 93
February 15, 2022 97
February 18, 2022 100
February 20, 2022 102
February 24, 2022 104
February 26, 2022 105
February 28, 2022 107
February 28, 2022 108
March 2, 2022 110
March 5, 2022 114
March 6, 2022 118
March 9, 2022 120
March 12, 2022 121
March 15, 2022 125
March 16, 2022 130
March 17, 2022 133
March 18, 2022 137
March 20, 2022 142
March 22, 2022 145
March 22, 2022 149
March 24, 2022 151
March 27, 2022 154
March 30, 2022 158

April 1, 2022 161

April 4, 2022 165

April 4, 2022 167

April 6, 2022 169

April 8, 2022 173

April 9, 2022 176

April 9, 2022 178

April 10, 2022 181

April 12, 2022 185

April 14, 2022 189

April 16, 2022 195

April 19, 2022 199

April 22, 2022 203

April 23, 2022 207

April 24, 2022 208

April 25, 2022 210

April 26, 2022 214

April 28, 2022 218

May 13, 2022 223

May 15, 2022 226

May 21, 2022 227

May 24, 2022 228

May 26, 2022 231

May 27, 2022 233

June 21, 2022 236

June 21, 2022 239

June 23, 2022 240

July 2, 2022 242

July 6, 2022 243

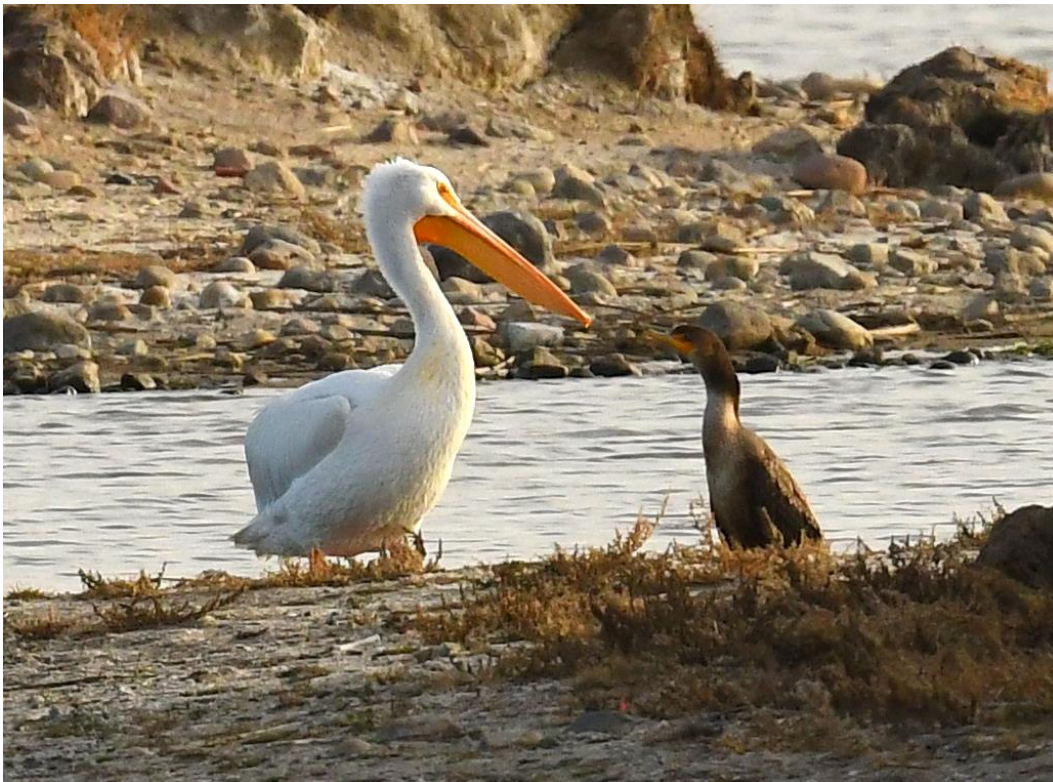
November 20, 2021

I went to Frank Lake this afternoon. The weather app on my iPhone caused me to think twice about it, but I went anyway. In High River, it was 1 degree and the wind was said to be 26 km/hr. There were two other vehicles parked in front of the locked gate when I arrived. Making sure I was well covered up, I went through the pedestrian gate. Two people were walking toward me on the gravel road. I asked them whether they had seen any birds. They said that they had seen a cormorant and a swan—but not much else.

I walked up the road toward the pull-off parking for the water pipeline inflow area. I expected that there would be open water down from the pipeline. It took me about 20 minutes. Thankfully, the wind was at my back. After I had arrived at the pull-off area, I walked west across the field in the direction of the inflow.

I could see two birds: an American White Pelican and a Double-crested Cormorant. They were standing side by side at the tip of land just before the island. Normally, according to *The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta*, there are minimal if any reports of pelicans after October in Alberta. A few cormorants, on the other hand, are sometimes seen in November. I took a photo of the two birds, and I've attached it to this post.

I took quite a few photos, even though it was bitterly cold. I'll post more later.



November 20, 2021

As I mentioned in a previous post, I went to Frank Lake this afternoon. The gate is locked, as it has been since the beginning of hunting season in September. So, I parked my car and walked in. It was cold, but not too bad—walking in—walking out was a different story, but I'll get to that in another post.

When I arrived at the pull-off parking area (when we were able to drive in), I walked across to the pipeline inflow stream, where I knew that there would be open water. I was surprised to see an American White Pelican and a Double-crested Cormorant standing side by side on the point of land just off the island. I posted a photo of them in a previous post.

Pelicans should have all gone south by now. I wondered if the pelican I saw was the same one that had an injured wing, and had over-wintered last winter. The cormorant that had been standing with the pelican suddenly went over toward another cormorant that appeared to have a wing problem—since the bird kept flapping a wing. Later, I saw four cormorants swimming in the water. I don't know if they included the other two or not.

I soon found out that the pelican could fly, because he abruptly flew a circuit over the basin. I didn't see him take off, because I was watching the cormorants. I didn't notice that the pelican was having any difficulty flying. I've attached the first photo I took of the pelican in the air. I think the backdrop of the setting sun and the clouds made a pretty picture.



Comment

Here's a photo of the pelican flying over the four cormorants.



November 20, 2021

In two previous posts, I showed an American White Pelican that I saw at Frank Lake today. I wondered if the pelican could fly, because no other pelicans were around. However, I saw him make a circuit around the basin—seemingly, he was OK. I posted a photo from that flight. While I was watching (and freezing 😞), I saw him make a second flight. I've attached a photo of the pelican just taking off from the water on his second flight. He didn't look like he was having too much trouble flying. Although some of my photos show the right wingtip folded under somewhat awkwardly.

Walking back from the pull-off parking area, I was terribly cold. The freezing wind was directly in my face all of the way. Next time, I'll wear something that pulls down over my face—I have two balaclavas, and I don't know why I didn't take one of them! But it was great to be out at Frank Lake again anyway. And I enjoyed seeing the pelican and cormorants, that I thought had all gone by now.



November 26, 2021

I went to Frank Lake this afternoon in order to see if the American White Pelican is still there. On my way to the island, on the west side of Frank Lake, I spotted Greg Wagner. He's the Caretaker for the Frank Lake IBA (Important Bird Area). I asked him if the pelican is still there, and he said yes. I could see something white on top of the island at the southern tip. That's where the pelican is, Greg said. I asked him if he thinks that the pelican is the same one that overwintered last year. Greg said that he thinks so. He said that he had seen one cormorant swimming in the lake as well. I didn't see the cormorant while I was there.

I spent quite a bit of time on the shore just across the water from the pelican. The pelican didn't move much while I was there. [Jeanne Burnham](#) has suggested that a good name for the pelican would be Elsa, from the movie Frozen. That sounds fitting to me. Elsa made it through one winter; hopefully she can do it again. I didn't ask Greg whether he thinks that the pelican is male or female. Greg said something else about the pelican also. The pelican is not in need of being rescued. There are lots of fish in the open water. And, with the water pipeline continuing to flow into Frank Lake, open water will be maintained. And, while Greg didn't say anything about cold tolerance, birds can apparently withstand cold temperatures by various means.

I've attached a cropped photo of Elsa on the southern tip of the island. She's relatively safe from predators there, and she has easy access to food. I'll post another photo as a comment—the full photo before the close crop—the sun was just starting to go down.



Comment

Here's my full photo of the apparently overwintering pelican on the island at Frank Lake, with the setting sun behind, prior to cropping it for my post above.



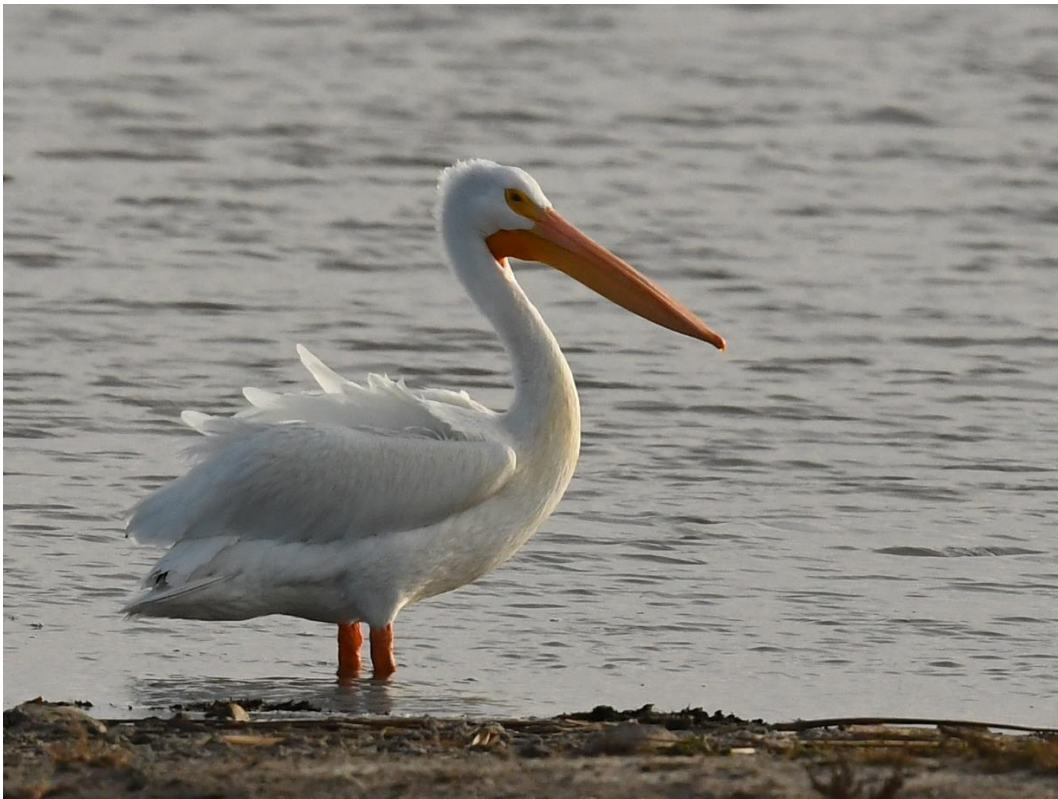
November 27, 2021

On Nov. 20, I posted a photo of an American White Pelican and a Double-crested Cormorant standing side by side. They were standing at the south end of the point of land just across from the island on the west side of Frank Lake. After I took that photo, the cormorant walked over to another cormorant that was partially hidden--it looked like the second one was having a wing problem, because the bird kept flapping one wing. When the pelican was alone, I took a few more photos while the pelican was standing there. I haven't posted any of the standing ones yet, however.

From the photos I took of that pelican that afternoon, it is evident that the pelican is able to fly. Indeed, the pelican took two short flights. I posted some of my shots of those flights. When I spoke with Greg Wagner at Frank Lake yesterday, he said that he thinks the pelican is the same one that overwintered at Frank Lake last winter. [Jeanne Burnham](#) and I discussed whether the pelican last winter could fly, and she showed me a photo that proves that it could fly--just not very high or very well. The pelican appeared to me to be flying much better now than last winter.

As I mentioned in my last post, [Jeanne Burnham](#) said that she likes to think of the pelican as "Elsa"--from the movie Frozen. I like that name as well, and I noticed that quite a few other members like that name too. We don't know whether Elsa is male or female, but [Sue Sargent](#) said that she had found that the name Elsa could be used for either gender.

I've attached one of my Nov. 20 photos of Elsa standing at the point of land just across from the island on the west side of Frank Lake; she was looking a little windblown--I was feeling quite windblown myself at that time 😊.



Comment

I've posted a few photos of Elsa flying from eight days ago. Here's another one, also from the same day--it was her second flight while I was there. She seemed to labour a bit in order to take off, but after she was airborne, she seemed to be flying OK.



November 30, 2021

I'm certainly getting a little exercise 😊. Once again, I walked into Frank Lake from the gate yesterday (Nov. 29) afternoon. I spotted Elsa, the overwintering American White Pelican, standing at the north end of the island—instead of at the south end where I saw her on my previous two visits, on Nov. 26 and 28. There was a Double-crested Cormorant standing on a rock just below her. I knew that the cormorant was in the vicinity, because other visitors had told me. But I hadn't seen it since Nov. 20, when I saw the cormorant flapping a wing rather aimlessly. So, I have confirmed that Elsa has company. Since pelicans and cormorants fish together, and since they often hang out together, the cormorant is appropriate company also.

When I visit Elsa, I usually stand on the shore. But since she was in a different place today, I thought that I would walk on the other side of the inflow to a point of land nearer the island to get a better view. I was still quite a distance from both the cormorant and Elsa. But both of them decided to leave as I came closer. The cormorant jumped into the water and tried to fly, but it could not. So, it swam northwest of the island to do some diving. Elsa stretched her wings. Then she jumped and sort of half flew into the water. After that she made a running takeoff. She took many steps in the water, and she looked like she was straining a lot. But, she did finally get up. She didn't fly very high or far. She flew around the island to the southeast. And then she came down into the water about half way between the island and the shore. She wasn't fishing; it just seemed that she wanted to swim for a while. She kept edging closer to where I was standing. When I went away from the point, she came quite close—she seemed to be curious about me.

I took lots of photos of Elsa (as you might expect 😊). I've attached one of them showing Elsa swimming—with a wavy reflection that I like.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa about to fly to the water on the other side of the island.

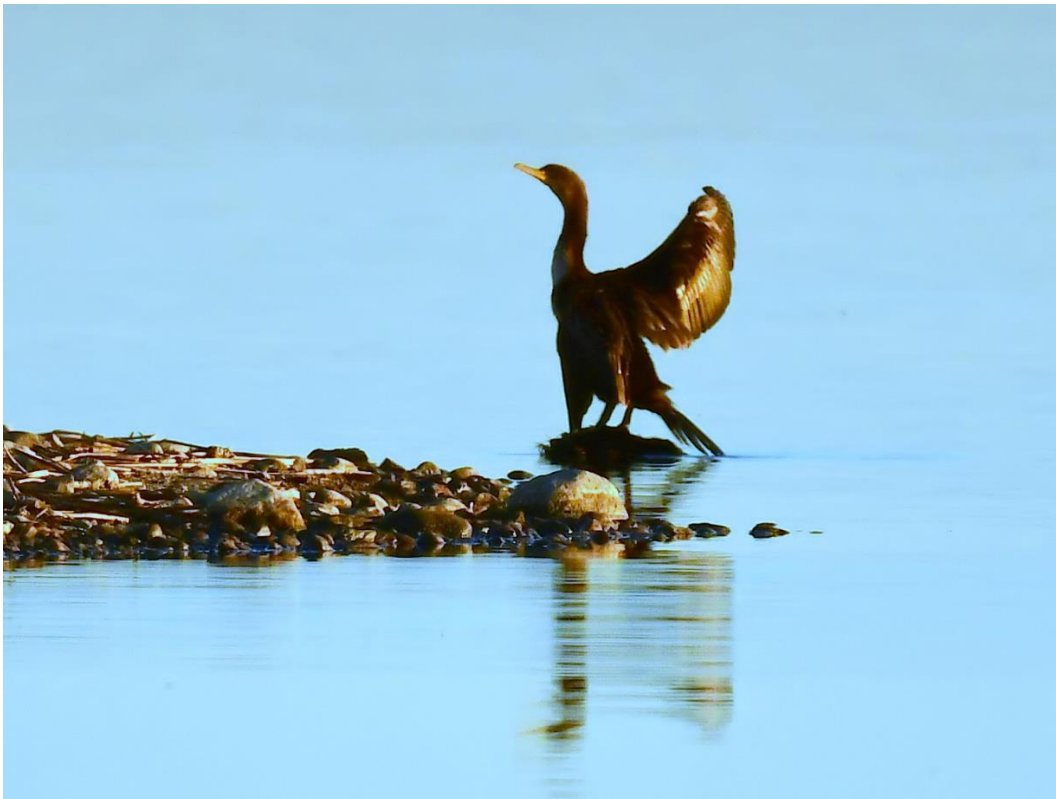


November 30, 2021

As I mentioned in my post early this morning, I walked into Frank Lake again yesterday. My primary purpose, of course, was to check on Elsa, the overwintering pelican. As I said in my post, Elsa was in a different location than she was on my previous two visits. She was at the north end of the island on the west side. And, for the first time, I could see the cormorant clearly. He was just down from Elsa, standing on a rock. I wasn't able to get any particularly good photos of the cormorant yesterday. It's difficult in the late afternoon to take good photos of a dark subject. But, I'll post one of the better ones I took. Notice that the cormorant has one wing up and one down. The one that's not raised would seem to be the bad one. I watched him try to fly but he is not able to do that.

Before I post my photo of the cormorant, I'd just like to comment on naming him (or her). In case you haven't read [Lori Dudley Lyons'](#) reply to my last post, or my reply to her, she offered the name "Olaf", which sounds like a good name. She says that Olaf is "cheerful and supportive", and his "greatest dream is to experience Summer." After doing some searching on the web, I came up with a name to consider also: "Sam." The movie, *Casablanca*, features a piano player named Sam, who provides music for the customers in Rick's Café Américain. In the movie, there's a scene in which Ilsa, played by Ingrid Bergman, implores Sam to play "As Time Goes By." Rick, who owns the café, is played by Humphrey Bogart. Rick and Ilsa used to be together. Do you suppose that there's a Rick in Elsa's life, who migrated with the other pelicans? Maybe her Rick will return next year.

I've attached one of my photos of the cormorant from yesterday.



December 1, 2021

Since I had to go to an appointment in Calgary at 3:30pm, I left for Frank Lake a little earlier than I usually do. I began walking in around 11:45, so I was standing on the shore on the west side around 12:15. I had been meaning to go out earlier anyway, because I wondered if Elsa, the American White Pelican, and Sam, the Double-crested Cormorant, would be doing something different than they had been doing on my previous visits.

As I was crossing the field, in front of the pipeline, I could see that Elsa was standing on top of the island on the southern tip. On my previous visit, she was on the northern tip. As before, Sam was just down from Elsa at the water level. Since he can't fly, he probably feels a bit vulnerable being up on top with Elsa. And, I think that she likes being slightly up from the water, so that she can jump off and fly if that should be necessary.

I wasn't very close before Sam started to swim away. I don't think that he's as comfortable with my presence as Elsa appears to be. Thankfully, before he left the island, I was able to take some decent shots of Elsa and Sam in the same photo—even though they were quite far apart—I'll post one later.

Elsa was very active today—but she remained on the tip of the island. Mostly, she was standing, but sometimes she was crouched a little. The previous time I visited, she made a brief flight. She also swam quite a bit. But today she seemed satisfied with preening and stretching on top of the island. At one point, she stretched her wings out fully. That's always so impressive when a pelican shows the nine foot wingspan that they have. The photo of Elsa that I'm attaching today doesn't show her wings fully extended, but it's the one I like the best.

One of these days, I'm going to get some good shots of Sam—but it wasn't to be today.



Comment

Here's a photo showing Sam on the left at water level, and Elsa on top of the island on the right.



Comment

When pelicans flap their wings, sometimes they look like they're directing an orchestra-- when I looked at one of my photos from yesterday afternoon, I was reminded of that.



Comment

As I mentioned in my post, Sam, the cormorant, swam away as I was arriving at my shore viewing location at Frank Lake. Here's my best photo of Sam, just before he left the island.



Comment

Here's another shot of Elsa. She seems to be looking quite bored.



December 2, 2021

A major vulnerability with both pelicans and cormorants, when they overwinter in Alberta, appears to be their feet. However, if their bodies function like those of ducks, they have a heat exchange system that helps to protect their feet from getting too cold. The arterial system of ducks keeps “the feet supplied with just enough blood to provide tissues with food and oxygen, and just warm enough to avoid frostbite.” And “by limiting the temperature difference between the feet and the ice [or other cold surfaces], heat loss is greatly reduced.” I read the preceding information at <https://askanaturalist.com/why-don%E2%80%99t-ducks%E2%80.../>.

Overwintering, of course, is helped by the open water that exists at Frank Lake—due to the pipeline inflow. While the air temperature will get to be way below 0, the water temperature will be 0 or higher. In addition to the higher temperature of the open water, Elsa and Sam are readily able to obtain fish. It’ll be tough, to be sure, but hopefully they’ll be able to pull it off.

I didn’t visit Frank Lake today, but I do have a photo of Elsa from yesterday that I’ll post. She appears to be looking right at me, as she frequently does.



Comment

Here's a profile shot of Elsa. I took it a few minutes prior to the photo I posted initially.



December 3, 2021

I mentioned, after my visit to Frank Lake on Nov. 29, when I went to see Elsa and Sam, the overwintering pelican and cormorant, that Elsa swam toward me when I started to leave. I took several photos then. However, the first time I saw those photos was this morning!

I had been taking both RAW and JPEG photos simultaneously that afternoon. So each click of my shutter resulted in the memory card storage of three times the usual amount of space (a RAW image is twice as large as a JPEG one). I didn't take any more photos than I usually do. But, it wasn't until I checked to see that I had cleared my main memory card this morning, that I found that the card had been filled, and my photos had overflowed to my second card. What a serendipitous discovery! On my second card, I had stored the photos of Elsa when she had come the closest to me ever! I should have realized that at the time I looked at my photos that evening, but I was a bit bushed from my visit that day.

I haven't decided whether I'll go to Frank Lake or not today, but I can certainly show you a new photo from Nov. 29! As always, the one I've attached to this post is the one I like the best. Elsa is standing in some shallow water just off the point of land opposite their island hangout. Note the drooping feather on her right wing; that's the wing that has appeared to give her problems when she decides to fly.



December 4, 2021

As I've mentioned in prior posts, Greg Wagner is the Caretaker for the Frank Lake IBA (Important Bird Area). When I first went to visit the overwintering American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant at Frank Lake on Nov. 20, I saw Greg and I spoke with him. He's regularly monitoring the situation with the injured birds. He told me at that time that he didn't advocate any rescue attempts.

Greg and I are members of a group called Albertabird within the groups.io facility. The way Albertabird works is as follows: Any member of the group can send messages to everyone else in the group by just sending email to the main group address. Photos may be included.

Several members who have commented on my posts about Elsa and Sam have wondered if a rescue attempt could and should be made for them. I saw a message that Greg sent to all of the Albertabird members. I hope that Greg won't mind if I quote his message:

"Last year, many people thought that the pelican should be rescued. I argued against that because I felt that the open water around the sewage outfall, coupled with the high Prussian Carp population in the lake would allow the bird to survive the winter at Frank Lake. I also feared that the bird could be stressed or injured during a rescue attempt. I believe that this is probably the best course for both the pelican and cormorant this year. However, water levels in the lake are much lower this year and may affect the amount of open water available. Therefore, habitat conditions should be monitored over the course of the winter, and if required, a rescue effort could be conducted."

Greg goes to Frank Lake regularly. He's assessing the situation very closely. I decided to visit Elsa and Sam also, because I thought that our Facebook Alberta Birds members would like to know how the overwintering birds are doing. I've taken a lot of pictures, and I've sent many of them to Greg. And, of course, I've shared some of my photos in Facebook. With the weather turning colder, and with snow having fallen, I haven't walked into Frank Lake since Dec. 1. I intend to resume visiting when the weather becomes somewhat better.

Until I can get some updated photos, I'll send a few of my older ones of Elsa and Sam. I don't have many of Sam, because he always seems to keep his distance. But Elsa has no qualms about staying put and even coming near when I visit. I've attached a photo from Dec. 1, when Elsa was standing on the southern tip of the island where she and Sam spend much of their time—when they're not swimming and fishing 😊.



December 7, 2021

[Don Whittaker](#) and I enjoyed a superb winter afternoon at Frank Lake today. There was a little mist coming off the lake, but that only added to the charm of our outing. We noticed that there's more ice on the portion of the lake that plays host to Elsa and Sam, the overwintering American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant. But there's still plenty of open water due to the fast-flowing effluent from the pipeline.

As we walked from the gate to the path across the field, we could see Elsa and Sam. They were swimming close to each other near the north end of the island. When we started to walk across the field, Elsa swam toward us, and Sam swam away from us to stand on the ice--he stayed there all the while we were taking photos. Elsa, on the other hand, spent a lot of time in the water close to the piece of land opposite the north end of the island--and directly across from us. She was quite active: preening, exercising her wings, standing up, and scrunching down. At one point, without any hint that we saw, she suddenly took off and flew low past the island on the east side. Then she swam back and forth the length of the island--occasionally, she would inspect us as she swam by--she didn't seem to be fearful of our presence in the slightest.

I struggled with choosing a photo to show everyone. [Don Whittaker](#) and I took a lot of pictures. The one I've selected is one that I almost missed. I mentioned that Elsa suddenly took to the air. That was right in front of us! And we were both shooting with 500mm lenses (that are really 750mm effective focal length, due to our cameras' 1.5X crop factor). So, there she was right in front of us, moving fast. I managed to fit her into a couple of frames--in one of them just barely--that is the photo that I've attached. Normally, I wouldn't post such a photo, with Elsa's bill almost touching the frame. But, I think the photo shows that she's able to move pretty well in her current winter home. We stayed for about two hours, then we reluctantly bid adieu to Elsa and Sam.



Comment

Here's Elsa checking us out as she swims by the island.



Comment

Here's Elsa doing some wing flapping.



December 9, 2021

As I mentioned in my post on Dec. 4, Greg Wagner, who is the Caretaker of the Frank Lake IBA (Important Bird Area), has stated that he feels that a rescue attempt of Elsa and Sam, the overwintering American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant, should not be attempted at this time. His reasoning is that the birds have open water and fish, and they should be able to survive the winter. And the birds could be injured and/or stressed by an attempted rescue. He is monitoring the birds and their environment regularly, however, and he will initiate a rescue attempt if he thinks that one should be made.

As you also know, if you've been following my posts, I've been making frequent walks into Frank Lake since Nov. 20. My last one was on Dec. 7 with [Don Whittaker](#). I intended to visit Elsa and Sam yesterday, but I found, after I parked at the gate, that the wind and slippery road surface seemed to be too hazardous. I'm going to go there tomorrow, since the weather forecast is quite favourable—and I'll be sure to wear my Ice Bugs boots that my wife bought me—they're supposed to aid footing on slippery surfaces.

I've never been able to get a good photo of Sam and Elsa together, because Sam always goes away. I have many photos of Elsa, because she comes relatively close—she appears to have become used to my visits. I decided to make a composite photo, from two photos I took on my last visit, showing both Sam and Elsa. I tried to adjust their relative sizes in the composite, so that Elsa appears to be about twice the length of Sam—she's also about four times his weight. Sam is standing on ice, and Elsa is standing in water by the ice.



Comment

Here's a photo I took of Elsa and Sam. I took the photo with my 500mm lens (that's really 750mm, with the crop factor), so they're much farther apart than they appear to be in the photo. Also, Sam is not quite in focus--I tried; I think my aperture was about $f/25$. Maybe Sam, like Elsa, will become used to my visits some time.



Comment

I took an iPhone photo of Elsa with the mountains in the background.



Comment

And here's a photo of Sam against the mountains. The sun was lower then.



December 9, 2021

[Don Whittaker](#) and I have so many photos of Elsa, an American White Pelican, from our visit to Frank Lake on Dec. 7. When she saw us on the shore, she swam very close to us. Her companion, Sam, a Double-crested Cormorant, went away from us onto the ice farther west in the basin. Elsa was very active, and enabled us to get many photos—it was like an Elsa modelling shoot 😊.

While she was standing across from us, Elsa flapped her wings a lot. She had a short flight while we were there also. I posted a shot yesterday of Elsa flying by on that flight. I decided to post another photo from Dec. 7 of Elsa, exercising her wings.



December 11, 2021

I arrived at the Frank Lake gate at around 1pm yesterday (since it's now past midnight as I write this). I bundled up well, because it was starting to get a bit chilly. As I mentioned I would, I was wearing my ice gripping boots. The road into Frank Lake did not seem nearly as slippery as it was two days ago, but it was still comforting to know that I was well shod. I had my usual Nikon camera, but with a smaller lens, fastened to a body harness. And I had my Sony travel camera, which has a zoom lens, attached to the harness as well—I was hoping to get a decent photo of both Elsa and Sam, the overwintering American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant, together.

As I left the road to cross the field, to go to the island that Elsa and Sam use as their base, I could see that Elsa was hunkered down on top of the north tip of the island. Sam was standing at the other end of the island. I stopped and took some photos of Elsa. Then I moved down the shore to get some photos of Sam. Sam decided to walk up the island a bit. Then I lost him. I think that what he did was to swim on the other side of the island to the north tip; the island is still surrounded by open water. When I saw him next, he was standing just out of the water not too far from Elsa.

Elsa wasn't moving much, but I saw her move around a little, and she seemed to be OK. The photo I've selected shows both Elsa and Sam with the mountains in the background; maybe it's just my imagination, but it seems like Sam is trying to urge Elsa to get up to go fishing with him. Throughout the summer, cormorants regularly fish with pelicans. Normally, cormorants eat about 1 lb. of fish per day. And pelicans eat about 4 lbs. of fish per day. No doubt they're both eating less than that with their inactivity.

I don't know whether Elsa and Sam went fishing or not, but I decided that I would leave. The temperature was just below zero, and the wind was 21 km/h (both readings were from High River, since there are no readings for Frank Lake). I saw Greg Wagner on my way out. He keeps checking on Elsa and Sam. He still thinks that the best course right now is just to let them be.



Comment

Here's a close-up photo of Elsa at the north end of the island.



Comment

And here's a close-up of Sam at the south end of the island.



December 12, 2021

I went to Frank Lake this afternoon to see Elsa and Sam, the overwintering American White Pelican and Double-crested Cormorant. Since the gate was locked for hunting season, starting in early September, I needed to walk in on the snow-covered gravel road—as I've been doing every few days since Nov. 20. After walking about 20 minutes, I followed a path across a field, in order to get to the effluent/water pipeline and eventually to the shore across from the island used by Elsa and Sam. As I was walking across the field, I spotted Elsa at the south end of the island. Since there is open water all around the island, they're quite safe from terrestrial predators there.

I took some photos of Elsa as I got closer. Then, when I was standing on the shore directly opposite Elsa, I took quite a few more photos. I remained there for a while. Elsa turned toward me a few times, but she didn't get up. She did reposition her head a few times. As she always does, when she's lying down on the raised rock surface of the island, she had her feet tucked into her feathers. And her neck was pulled into her body. In that position, it's like she's wearing a feather comforter. That reminds me of something I read yesterday on the following website:

<http://www.adirondackwildlife.org/GreatHornedOwls.htm> . I had been looking for information on Great Horned Owls, because I had seen one the previous day. The information that I found pertained not only to that non-migratory bird species, but it's also relevant for any species of bird that overwinters. Here's a quote from that website:

“Birds do not migrate because of colder winter weather. In fact, feathers are much more effective insulators than mammalian fur, and when combined with the internal heat generated by their higher metabolism, birds are better equipped to withstand cold weather than mammals are. What drives birds to warmer climates is the lack of food available to them in the winter.”

So, Elsa and Sam are wearing their insulation; all they need is food, of which there is plenty—in the open water down from the pipeline.

The photo I want to share today, shows Elsa trying to keep as warm as possible on top of the island. She had her head turned slightly toward me. She didn't stand up all of the time I watched her. But she did move her head and neck a bit. Sam wasn't visible today. I suspect that he was on the other side of the island.



Comment

Here's another shot of Elsa all snuggled into her feathers.



December 14, 2021

I changed my profile and cover photos today. Also, I gave everyone a brief story on my timeline about Elsa and Sam, the overwintering pelican and cormorant at Frank Lake.

I haven't visited Elsa and Sam since Dec. 12. As you know, if you've seen my posts, I only saw Elsa that day. And she was hunkered down keeping warm on top of the island. [Karyn Lee](#) reported that she had been there earlier in the day on Dec. 12, and she saw Elsa take one flight, and then swim back and forth beside the island. She said that she was very active. She didn't say anything about Sam.

I didn't go to Frank Lake today, but I might go tomorrow. I hope that I'll be able to see Sam as well as Elsa.

I have another photo of Elsa that I want to share. I took it on Dec. 7, which is the last time that I saw Elsa fly. In my photo, Elsa is just about to take off for a short flight from north of the island to just south of the island--the incident seems to be very similar to the time that [Karyn Lee](#) saw her fly on Sunday.



Comment

I took this photo of Elsa a couple of seconds after the one I posted above. She had just managed to attain lift off. Notice the water splash down from her right wing. It must have dipped a little as she strained to get into the air. The right wing is the one that she has had trouble with.



December 15, 2021

I'm going to have to find some solution to keeping my hands sufficiently warm when I'm at Frank Lake in temperatures like we had today. When I walked in today, I had no problem with any part of my body except my hands. I was wearing gloves (which was probably my first mistake) with finger and thumb tips that open. It doesn't work very well when I try to make camera settings and take photos with my gloves on. That's why I was wearing gloves with fingertips that open. However, it was so cold today that I could not have my fingers exposed for very long. I think I need to find warm mitts with easy openings—so that I can quickly shoot and then thaw my fingers.

I didn't stay opposite the island very long, but I wanted to check up on Elsa, the overwintering pelican. I wanted to assess how I think she looks, and I wanted to bring back a few photos. She seemed to be fine. She wasn't being very active. She was lying down at the north end of the island—with her feet tucked into her feathers. Initially, she had her neck pulled way into her body. But several times she raised her neck up and looked around—seemingly being very perky. When I left, she had pulled her head back into her body.

I haven't mentioned Sam, the cormorant, yet. On the way into Frank Lake, I met Greg Wagner, the Caretaker of Frank Lake—I think he goes there every day—I certainly see him almost every time I go. He said that he had not seen “the cormorant” at all in the past two days. I told him that he had been sighted last Sunday, and Greg said that he was aware of his presence then. Now, however, he fears the worst. He thinks that he is no longer alive—but he hadn't yet spotted his body. When I arrived at the island, I looked carefully on both tips of the island as well as all over the top of the island. I looked in the water around the island as well. I couldn't see on the other side of the island, however. I suspect that Greg is correct about Sam's demise, unfortunately.

Extremely sad news. I thought that Sam hadn't been doing nearly as well as Elsa, because I had never seen him lying down and snuggled into his feathers like Elsa. I've attached a photo of Elsa, where she is looking very alert. With this being her second winter, I have a good feeling about her ability to withstand whatever the weather holds in store.



December 18, 2021

There was a bit of a break in the weather today at Frank Lake. I thought that if I were to leave right after our breakfast (which we always have late in the morning 😊), then I would catch the best part of the day for the weather. The temperature was to be around -3 or so just after noon. And the wind was only around 10 kph. Another reason for going early is that there was a wind advisory, for later in the afternoon, for the possibility of wind velocity as high as 90 kph! I definitely didn't want to be out in that! And some final encouragement was that the temperature was due to start dropping in the early afternoon. So, I bundled up in my usual garb, and headed to Frank Lake.

I had just pulled up to park in front of the gate at Frank Lake around 12:30, when I saw a vehicle coming up the access road. It stopped right beside my car. There were two women. The driver asked me "Are you John Reasbeck?" I confirmed that I am indeed. She said that her name is Kathryn. She made some very nice comments about my Alberta Birds posts about Elsa and Sam, and I thanked her. She could see that I was just about to walk in and see Elsa, and she said that she didn't think that she would want to do that 😊. I said something like "I understand." Nice chat! I'm sorry, I didn't get the name of the second woman. They went on their way, and I did likewise.

I was nearing the water/effluent pipeline, across the field, when a number of mallards flew up. They had been gathered down by the inflow (or outflow, depending on your point of view 😊)—the water is undoubtedly warmer there than it is downstream; so Elsa and the mallards have a spa that they can take advantage of; that's where the fish come in for Elsa also—from the Highwood River. I took some photos as the mallards flew. They were going toward Elsa—she was lying down in her usual resting position on the north tip of the island. The mallards looked like they were going to join some other mallards in the west—just off the ice. I think maybe there were around 25 or so mallards in the area, because I spotted some southeast of the island also. So, Elsa has a little company. I looked carefully on and around the island, and in the water, but I saw no sign of Sam. So, unfortunately, I would have to think that Greg Wagner is correct in thinking that he's no longer part of the scene 😞.

Anyway, this is getting much longer than I intended. Elsa looked well. She looked bright, and relatively comfortable. She was moving around a little, but she didn't stand up while I was there. As I mentioned, I'm attaching a photo of the mallards flying past Elsa to join some other mallards. I've certainly taken many photos of mallards in the winter, but I've never had a photo of them before where a pelican was included.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa on the island today. She's looking very well!



December 19, 2021

Yesterday, at Frank Lake, I took some iPhone shots of Elsa, the overwintering pelican. I often use my iPhone, as a wide-angle camera, so that I can remember the way a scene looked--even if the images aren't as sharp as with my Nikon camera. I've attached one of those shots. In the photo, Elsa has assumed her tucked in-snuggle position, so that she can get as warm as possible. Even though she's resting, she always seems to be looking around for any possible danger. From her slightly-elevated perch, if she had to, she could jump down and fly very quickly.



December 19, 2021

Here's a close-up photo of Elsa, the overwintering pelican, from yesterday at Frank Lake. She's resting, she's trying to keep as warm as possible, and she's seemingly well aware of her surroundings.



December 22, 2021

😊Elsa Report😊

I'm pleased to report that Elsa, the overwintering American White Pelican at Frank Lake, is doing fine! When I first arrived at Frank Lake today, I saw Elsa lying down at the north edge of the island she's been using as a base. At that point, she's able to see around her for almost 360°. She can see if anything is on the piece of land to the north—just across some open water. She can view the small strip of open water to the northwest of her—with a large stretch of ice to the south, west, and northwest of the open water. And she can scan the large expanse of open water off the entire east side of the island. She regularly turns her head also so that she can look south over the length of the island. About the only area that she's not able to see is directly south of the island where mallards like to gather—I think there were about 25 of them there today—swimming and dabbling in the water and walking or resting on the ice.

By comparison with recent weather, and certainly in contrast with the expected frigid weather coming over Christmas and several days beyond that, today it was quite balmy. I half expected that Elsa might take a flight around the island, as I've seen her do a few times in the past month. Unfortunately, she didn't fly. But she got up soon after I started watching her today, and she stretched and flapped her wings. I was able to get a few photos of that session for you. I've attached one of my photos with the setting sun in the background. Elsa seemed to be in good spirits today!



December 23, 2021

😊Elsa Report Addendum😊

I noted a couple of items, which I haven't yet mentioned, on my visit to see Elsa at Frank Lake yesterday. I spoke with a photographer named Mike at the pipeline inflow. He had positioned himself there so that he could photograph any critter that came to that location. He said that a few weeks ago he saw Elsa make a long flight over the observation blind and back to the open water by the island. I didn't ask him for photos, however, because I had just gotten back from taking photos of Elsa, and it was getting dark. Mike likes to go to the pipeline for photos, so when I see him next, I'll ask him if he would send me any photos of Elsa flying (or fishing). And I'll ask him if he would mind if I were to post one or two.

The other item, along the same line, is my encounter with a Frank Lake regular photographer named Russ, as I was walking back to my car. He mentioned that he had seen Elsa catching fish. He wasn't sure that he had been able to get any good photos though. I asked him if he would send me some photos if he finds that he has some. Again, when/if I get them, I'll post the photos if Russ says that it's OK to do that.

I keep looking at the weather forecasts for High River for the next week and hoping that they'll somehow magically improve. I'm not as tough as Elsa, but I'll try to get over to see her as often as I can.

I picked out a few more photos from yesterday that I'll post here.



Comment

Here's another photo of Elsa just after she had done her wing exercises.



Comment

And here's another photo of Elsa, as she settled in for the evening.



December 25, 2021

Merry Christmas to all Alberta Birds Elsa watchers!

I appreciate the encouragement that so many of our members have provided for Elsa to do well, and for me to continue to give everyone news about her!

Since Nov. 20, I've been frequently dropping by to see her at Frank Lake. She is an oddity, in that American White Pelicans are not supposed to be there right now. The other pelicans that were at Frank Lake in the summer and fall (approximately 700 of them!) have long since migrated. It has been evident that Elsa can fly (much better than she could when she had her first overwintering experience last winter!), but it seems that she still doesn't sufficiently trust her flying ability in order to be able to fly long distances. So, she opted again to remain behind. We all hope that her experiences last winter will enable her to make it through to spring once more—when she will again be joined by other pelicans.

Until I can say that Elsa's overwintering has been successful, I will continue to report, as frequently as possible, on Elsa's state: that she appears to have enough food; that her feathers seem to be giving her sufficient warmth; and that her protective island base is still enabling her to evade predators

I've attached one of my photos from the first time I visited Elsa on Nov. 20. She flew quite high and a considerable distance at that time. Since then, I've seen her make several flights, but they've all been of much shorter height and duration. It could be that she was having a good look around on Nov. 20 in order to be sure that the spot she chose is the best place for her to remain. She evidently decided that Frank Lake is a reasonable place in which to spend another winter. And what she needs to do now is to eat, exercise, stay warm, rest, and remain vigilant—and wait for her friends to return.

I have not forgotten about Sam, the Double-crested Cormorant, that also had flying problems. He too remained at Frank Lake for a period of time. I felt very sad when it seemed that he wasn't being seen any longer at Frank Lake. Every time I go to see Elsa, I search on and near the island. But I've not been able to locate him.



December 28, 2021

😓 Elsa Report 😓

I walked in to see Elsa, the overwintering pelican, at Frank Lake this afternoon. I hadn't been there since Dec. 22. I've been averaging a visit every three or four days. But, with the cold weather and Christmas, I delayed my next visit a bit.

Santa was good to me, in that I got a few cold weather items to help me in my treks into Frank Lake. My old mitts with open fingers are OK in the fall, but not in winter deep freeze temperatures. I now have heavy knit mitts with open fingers, I also have some really heavy mitts for when the going is tougher. And I have a hand warmer—that's actually too warm, even on the low setting—I think I'm supposed to keep it in its bag, instead of using it directly on my fingers. But, all I needed today were the woolen mitts, since it was a "balmy" -18, with a wind chill of -23. That's still cold, but it was no doubt very welcome by Elsa, in comparison with the record setting low on Boxing Day in High River of -33.7— with a wind chill that we probably don't want to think about.

I'm showing "relieved smiley" faces above, because that's how I felt when I first saw Elsa today. I figured that she would still be OK, since she had to put up with severe wintry conditions last year too. But, all the same, I was glad when I found her swimming beside the island today. She had some company: there were 18 or so mallards near her. Elsa remained in the water all of the time I was there. She swam along the east side of the island. And then she swam toward the pipeline. I stayed back a bit because I didn't want to dissuade her from getting any fish that might be coming into Frank Lake. Also, I assumed that the warmer water by the outflow would probably feel good, and I wanted her to be able to enjoy it. After a few minutes, she turned around and swam back.

The photo that I've attached shows Elsa swimming by me heading for the island. I'm glad that she decided to do that, because I was able to get some better photos than I had up until then. Looking good, Elsa 😊!



December 31, 2021

The Wild Bird Store, in their January 2022 Newsletter, published an article about Elsa, the overwintering American White Pelican at Frank Lake. They included a photo of Elsa that I took on Nov. 26. The Wild Bird Store reported discussions that Brian Keating had, concerning Elsa, her predicament, and her environment, with Chris Fisher and Greg Wagner. I took a photo of the article, and I've attached it to this post.

Injured Pelican

Dr. Brian Keating confirmed after talking with fellow Alberta naturalists Chris Fisher and Greg Wager, their best guess as to how Elsa, an American white pelican (named after the main character in the Disney movie "Frozen") was injured and forced to remain at Frank Lake, east of High River, is that she/he was injured by a natural predator (like a coyote or eagle), a hunter's buckshot or by hitting a power line.



Warm treated effluent from Cargill and the Town of High River keeps a small section of the channel to the lake free from ice.

A population of introduced fish called Prussian carp (related to goldfish), which are in huge numbers in the lake and always swarming around that inflow pipe, have enabled Elsa to find food.

It has been confirmed that Elsa can sit on a rock beside the in-flow....and when hungry, just lean over and scoop up the fish.

Photo of Elsa taken by John Reasbeck

Comment

Here's my original photo of Elsa that was published in the newsletter.



Comment

My photo in the article shows her just trying to keep warm. Here's another photo of Elsa three days later on Nov. 29. She was up and not really looking sad at all. It's too bad that she has a wing problem, but she's trying to make the best of an unfortunate situation.



January 1, 2022

😬 Finding Elsa 😬

Mostly, I stayed home from November 2020 to March 2021. I didn't feel comfortable going anywhere with Covid on the loose. I hadn't posted at all in Facebook during that time.

On March 19, I made a quick trip to Frank Lake. The gate had just been unlocked that day. I saw Ring-billed Gulls, California Gulls, and Canada Geese. I didn't stay long, and I didn't take many photos.

Two days later, I went to Frank Lake again. I noticed that someone had put up a sign with the title "ABOUT THE PELICAN." An injured pelican was apparently overwintering there, because it couldn't fly well enough to migrate. I saw an American White Pelican lying down on the south edge of the island. In the summer and fall, about two hundred pelicans had often gathered on that island. I hoped that the pelican would get up so that I could be assured that it was OK, but it stayed lying down. Two geese were standing beside it.

I took a picture of the geese and the pelican. That was my first photo of the pelican that we now know as Elsa. I've attached it to this post.

So, if 2022 is like 2021, then Elsa will have much better weather and a lot of company in about 2 1/2 months. Hang in there, Elsa! You have a sizable cheering squad on the sidelines! It won't be long until spring! 🥳 😊



Comment

Here's a photo of the sign that I saw posted at the pipeline inflow at Frank Lake on March 21.



Comment

Notice that the right wing tip of the pelican on the sign above is dipping into the water. I took a photo on Nov. 29 showing that Elsa also dips her right wing tip into the water sometimes. I've attached that photo.



January 2, 2022

♥️ Elsa Report ♥️

The Weather app on my iPhone is forecasting colder temperatures in High River for the next six days. That location is as close as I can get to what it will be like in Frank Lake. Today the temperature was just below zero, but there was a very brisk wind. At one time during the day it was 45 kph. When I was there today, it was around 16 kph.

After parking my car at the Frank Lake gate, I fixed my camera to my chest harness. Although the sun had ducked behind a cloud, it seemed nice enough that I wondered whether I needed my parka. I decided to wear it anyway—and, later, I was very glad that I had it. After I donned my additional gear, I was off through the pedestrian access and down the road.

The sun was shining a little, but the temperature was starting to drop some. It was late in the day, so I figured that Elsa (the overwintering American White Pelican, for those who don't read my posts regularly) would probably be hunkered down on the island. And, that's exactly where I found her. The only other birds I saw in the area were five Mallards. There was still open water going from the pipeline inflow to past the island. I took some photos from different angles. Elsa was in what I think of as her warming and resting period. She always seems to have an eye out for possible danger too. I was happy to see Elsa looking well.

On my return walk, I was somewhat alarmed to see a Bald Eagle. The eagle flew in the direction of the mallards and landed on the ice. Elsa must have had a good view of the eagle, but I wondered whether the mallards knew it was there.

I've attached one of my photos of Elsa. The first one of her in 2022. Happy New Year, Elsa!



January 6, 2022

😊Elsa History😊

The first time I went to Frank Lake in 2021 was on Mar. 19. I saw California Gulls, Ring-billed Gulls, Canada Geese, and an American White Pelican. The pelican seemed like an odd sighting—I didn't know that one was overwintering. I didn't post anything on Facebook. As a matter of fact, I hadn't posted anything since the previous year in November. Since I had no desire to go out anywhere, I hadn't been taking many photos--except in our backyard. And I was contemplating taking an online course in the new year, so I just decided to stop posting for a while.

The next time I went to Frank Lake was on Mar. 21. A sign had been posted in front of the pipeline outflow saying that a pelican was overwintering there because it had been injured and couldn't migrate. I later found out that Greg Wagner, the Caretaker for Frank Lake, had posted that sign. I paid more attention to the pelican on that visit, because of the sign.

I sent a photo of the sign to my daughter, who used to work at CBC 1010 in Calgary. She thought that it might be of interest to the CBC, so she sent my photo of the sign to The Homestretch. As it turned out, the CBC was indeed sufficiently interested in the story that they alerted Brian Keating, and he discussed the pelican with Chris Fisher and Greg Wagner. In addition, he and his wife made a visit to Frank Lake to find the pelican. His story went on the air on Apr. 12. In addition to being on the air, the story was posted on the web on Apr. 13 at the following link: <https://www.cbc.ca/.../brian-keating-injured-pelican...>

In Brian Keating's story, he reported that the pelican had a buddy. I looked through my photos in that period, and I found that "the buddy" must have arrived between Apr. 2 and Apr. 6. He or she was sporting a bump on the top of his/her bill—that's called a nuptial tubercle. It indicates that a pelican is an adult and is ready to mate. The pelican that we've been calling Elsa didn't have one of those. I guess that she was either too young, or other things had been paramount in her overwintering life—like staying alive 😞.

I've attached a photo, which I took on Apr. 6, showing Elsa and the first pelican that arrived to accompany her after her long winter last year (Elsa is the pelican on the left). After that, not too many days passed by until there were many more pelicans—as well as many more birds of various species. The gulls in my photo are primarily California Gulls, but there were some Ring-billed Gulls too. At that time, there were several hundred gulls there--Elsa hadn't lacked company for some time!



January 10, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

Yesterday (Sunday) afternoon, for all of the time I was there, Elsa was hunkered down on the north end of the island at Frank Lake. Elsa, of course, for those readers who might have missed my previous posts, is an overwintering American White Pelican. She can fly a bit, but not well enough to migrate.

Elsa seems to be doing fine. No doubt, she will welcome the warmer weather that we're about to get at Frank Lake. Maybe she'll be inclined to swim and stretch her wings a bit. I've seen her fly on three previous visits, and she did well—just not very high or far.

Elsa had seven ducks for company yesterday. There were three Common Goldeneyes and four Mallards. The mallards kept their distance, but one of the goldeneyes came close enough for some photos—I'll put one in the comments.



Comment

Here's a photo of one of the three male Common Goldeneye ducks that I saw at Frank Lake yesterday.



January 11, 2022

🌤️👤 Elsa Report 👤🌤️

No doubt Elsa, the overwintering American White Pelican at Frank Lake, enjoyed the warmer temperatures today. When I was there this afternoon, the temperature was 6. However, the wind was quite severe. As I walked along the gravel road from the gate, I could feel the wind blowing slightly behind me from the west. Another visitor was walking toward me, and he kept stopping, and then he walked backwards for a bit. We chatted briefly. He looked quite windblown. When I arrived at the field path, I checked my weather app; it indicated that the wind was 32 km/hr in High River

I was happy to find that some of the snow in the field had either melted or been tromped down by other visitors as they crossed the field toward the water pipeline. I was still happy to have brought my walking poles, however. As I walked, I could see Elsa in the distance, in her familiar position on the north point of the island. I went down to the shore just across from her and took a few photos.

I thought that Elsa looked quite a bit more interested in what was going on in her domain today. She often looked in the direction of three Common Goldeneye drakes that were in the northwest diving and swimming. They were too far away to get any good pictures though. From time to time, Elsa turned her head from one side to the other, as she always does, to make sure that she's aware of her surroundings. I remained across from her on the shore for about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour. I thought that she looked quite good today. Her right wing tip, which is the one that appears to have been injured before last winter, was tucked nicely into her feathers.

I've attached a shot of Elsa, which I've cropped with some of the lower part of the island. Generally, I thought that Elsa didn't look nearly as cold as she did on my last visit. She's just keeping warm, eating, staying alert, and waiting this thing through. Maybe next time I go, I'll get myself together early enough in the day so that I can see what Elsa is up to in the morning. ❤️



January 13, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

I saw [Donna Glawson](#)'s report today that she saw Elsa, the overwintering pelican, both swimming and flying at Frank Lake this afternoon! She said that Elsa flew four or five times! Unfortunately, she didn't take any photos, but she said that she did have a video. She was apparently having difficulty posting it, however.

I have a photo of Elsa that I took on my visit two days ago that I'd like to share. I took a second camera with a wide angle lens with me then, and one of my images shows Elsa with three Common Goldeneyes that were swimming and diving near her. I thought that you might find it interesting.

I'll be going to see Elsa tomorrow. So, if she's not too tired out from her multiple flights today, maybe I'll be able to bring you back some in flight photos.



Comment

Here's another photo from my visit to see Elsa on Jan. 11. I caught two of the goldeneyes flying. They went around the island and landed to the south of it. It wasn't too much later that they flew back to rejoin the other goldeneye near Elsa.



Comment

Elsa seems to be looking at me in this photo. She regularly scans around herself to see what's going on. I took this photo on Jan. 11 also.



January 14, 2022

😊 Elsa Report 😊

Elsa, the overwintering pelican, was quite active at Frank Lake today! When I saw her first, she was stretching and flapping her wings just off the point of land across from her usual hunkering down spot on top of the island—just downstream from the treated effluent/water pipeline. I think that she was greeting the improved temperatures with a great deal of enthusiasm.

Elsa made one short flight while I was there. She flew just above the water for the length of the island. She didn't seem to have any trouble at all getting up in the air. After she landed in the water, she made a leisurely swim back to where she had started from—across from the north tip of the island.

I noticed in some of my photos that Elsa has a large bare spot on the back of her neck. I sent photos to Greg Wagner, asking him if he thinks that the spot is anything to worry about. Other than that, Elsa seemed to be in good health and spirits; she was just enjoying the pause in the cold weather. I looked on the Weather Network for a 14-day forecast for High River. Except for one day, which will still not be too bad, they say that the mild temperatures will likely continue until at least Jan. 28.

So, keep up your flying and swimming, Elsa! April, and your pelican friends, will be here soon! 😊



Comment

Here's another photo of Elsa swimming back to her hangout spot for the afternoon.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa flapping her wings today.



Comment

Here's looking at you, Elsa!



January 16, 2022

😊👉 Elsa Report 👈😊

Elsa, the overwintering pelican, had more company than usual today at Frank Lake. South of the island, there were two Canada Geese and a Common Goldeneye. North of the island, there were two Common Goldeneyes. And, due to the continuing mild weather, there were quite a few human visitors. When I parked in front of the gate, my car was vehicle #6. Not all of the people were there to see Elsa. Some visitors seemed to be just enjoying a walk. And I saw a few fishing near the pipeline.

I met Greg Wagner, the Caretaker for Frank Lake, as I was walking in. He had not picked up my email yet, so I described the grey and pink spot on the back of Elsa's neck. Greg said that he would look at my photos later. Greg was somewhat alarmed when he saw two people walking toward where he had seen Elsa—standing in the water across from her usual resting place on the island. Evidently, Elsa saw the people coming and had moved to just off the shore east of the island.

As I was walking toward the shore, I saw Elsa starting to swim back toward the island. When I got to the shore, I took a few photos. When she arrived at the island, she stretched and flapped her wings, and then she got up on the island and started to walk toward her usual perch on top of the island. Before she settled down to rest and snuggle, she opened her bill wide as [Jennil Modar](#) has already shown in another post. So, I'll post another shot, which is decidedly more subdued. I'll post a few more photos as comments.

I should mention that [Donna Glawson](#) came by to say hi while I was watching Elsa. It was nice to meet you, Donna!



Comment

Here's another photo of Elsa before she stepped onto the island. When she flaps forward like she's doing, I think she looks like she's directing an orchestra or a choir 😊.



Comment

Elsa opened her wings to help get on top of the island. Here she is with her wings still open after she had arrived at her usual perch.



Comment

Here's Elsa, just before she stepped onto the island this afternoon.



Comment

Here's how Elsa looked as she swam from just off the shore, east of the island, to the island.



January 17, 2022

😊 Elsa Windows Wallpaper 😊

Since I've been visiting her so much over the past two months, I decided that I would like to see Elsa, the overwintering pelican, when I turn on my PC. If anyone would like to use the wallpaper that I created, I've attached it to this post. I took the photo yesterday at Frank Lake. Please use it if you wish. And, of course, if you want to share it with friends, please feel free to do so. The resolution of the file is 2200X1238 pixels, which provides a 16:9 aspect ratio, so the photo will fit nicely on a normal TV-aspect monitor. I intend to provide additional wallpaper, as Elsa's winter trial at Frank Lake continues. I'm thinking that it might be nice to have February, March, and April wallpaper—after that, Elsa will have become just one of the many pelicans at Frank Lake.

UPDATE

In order to be able to get my original high resolution wallpaper photo, it's necessary for me to store a copy somewhere other than Facebook--since Facebook doesn't allow images to be downloaded with their original resolutions. Therefore, I've created a photo album called Alberta Birds Wallpaper in Google Photos. I've set up access for everyone from a link that I was provided. Here's the link:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/hFNArBXgwtppffftJA>

I've only put the photo that I attached to this post in the album.

Click on the photo, choose More Options (the three vertical dots on the right), and then select Download/Save File/OK. The wallpaper file should then be downloaded to the Downloads folder on your PC.

And, when I've created the Elsa wallpaper files for February, March, and April, then I'll put them in the album also.

This is an experiment. I hope that it works!

☀️ Second Update ☀️

I made more wallpaper files with Elsa for January. I used aspect ratios for iPads and iPhones. I made both landscape and portrait versions. I tried to access them in Google Photos with my iDevices, but I had some trouble getting at the downloads. So, I switched to Dropbox, which is another cloud sharing facility.

Here's a link to the Dropbox folder with all of the wallpaper files:

<https://www.dropbox.com/.../AACGYCo1ZnBWvQHpzmmwyLba...>

Please let me know if anyone has any difficulty accessing the files.

Thanks!



January 19, 2022

★Elsa Report★

The wind chill was probably about -20 when I visited Elsa, the overwintering pelican, at Frank Lake this afternoon. She has been in far worse conditions this winter. Although tomorrow is supposed to be a warmer day, I was most anxious to see how Elsa looked after the past few colder days and nights.

I found her crouched down in the water just off the point of land opposite the north tip of the island. She remained hunkered down all of the while I was there today. She looked fine; she just wasn't moving much. What seems to happen is that Elsa likes to stand in the water at that location to rest and to get some of the warm water that comes from the pipe-line. I've never seen her stay there when it starts to get dark, because she probably feels that being on top of the island is a safer place to be at night.

It was not possible for me to get any reasonable photos of Elsa today, because there was a mist just off the water that was being blown beside the island and crossing right in front of her. This photographer was freezing his fingers too. 😞 So, I failed to get any updated photos to show you. I looked at some of my recent photos, where there was no mist, good light, and Elsa's position and location were about the same as they were today. I found a suitable photo from Jan. 14, which I'll attach to this post. She was in her standard resting and warming snuggle in the water just across from the island—as she was today.

I counted lots of company for Elsa today. There were 11 Common Goldeneyes. Several times a few of them swam very close to Elsa. I don't know if they were just being fascinated by the big white bird, or whether they were trying to encourage her to get up and do some fishing, so that they could have some of the fish that might fall from her bill. 😊



January 22, 2022

😬 Elsa Report 😬

I paid a visit to Elsa, the overwintering pelican, at noon today. She was standing just off the water about halfway down the east side of the island at Frank Lake. It seemed like a strange place for her to be. Then I saw something that I hadn't seen before. Someone had driven a truck onto the ice south of the island. I saw a man and two kids. It looked and sounded like the man was cutting a hole in the ice in order to do some fishing. Elsa was watching them very carefully. The man pulled up a chair and the kids played on the ice. They stayed for a while. Elsa decided that it was safe to go back to the island.

Elsa settled in on her island perch. Suddenly, Elsa decided to get down from her perch. I saw the reason. The man and the kids were driving in Elsa's direction on the west side of the island. They stopped just across the water and ice northwest of the island. The man carried an ice hole driller to a spot on the ice. Meanwhile, Elsa had flown down to water level. The man drilled a hole in the ice and set up his fishing apparatus. Elsa decided that she didn't want to be anywhere close to that action, and she swam and flew over to some goldeneyes that were swimming in the southeast corner.

Eventually, the man decided to give up the ice fishing and they left. They disappeared driving southeast on the ice. Elsa decided that the coast was clear, and she started to swim back just off the east side of the island. Then she went back to her perch.

When I first saw the ice fisherman, I sent an email to Greg Wagner. I sent two more emails when I saw the truck driving west of the island. I spoke with my wife. She called Ducks Unlimited and left a voice message. If I haven't heard anything by tomorrow, I'll try to find out who else I could call. It could be that the man had authorization to be out there. But, maybe not also. In any case, Elsa seemed to be a bit unnerved by the goings-on.

I don't think that there's any cause for worry, because now that I know what happened, I can do something about it. As soon as I've learned more, I'll let everyone know.

I've attached a photo of Elsa as she was about to settle back on her perch on the island.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa watching the truck with the ice fisherman.



Comment

Here's Elsa as she swam by me going to her perch on the island.



January 24, 2022

☀️ Elsa Recent Visit ☀️

My last visit to see Elsa, the overwintering pelican, was on Jan. 22. I intend to go again later this week.

I was looking on the Weather Network, and I found that the temperatures in High River should be similar to those that Elsa enjoys now at Frank Lake until about the end of January. Unfortunately, the temperatures will then dip a little—but nothing as severe as those that she has already shown that she can handle well.

The photo of Elsa that I've attached shows her spreading her wings to give herself some assistance and stability as she comes down from the top of the island. She spreads her wings when she goes up to the top of the island as well. She may not be flying much, but I've noticed that she regularly relies on her wings. I did see her fly low to the water for a short distance on my visit. I keep hoping, as I'm sure that we all are, that Elsa will some day be able to fly as well as other pelicans. It would be so fantastic if she could migrate with the others in the fall!

So, here's my photo from Jan. 22 of Elsa coming down to the water level from her usual platform on the north tip of the island.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa that I took just after the one I posted originally. It might have a caption "Wheee"! Both of her feet are clearly visible.



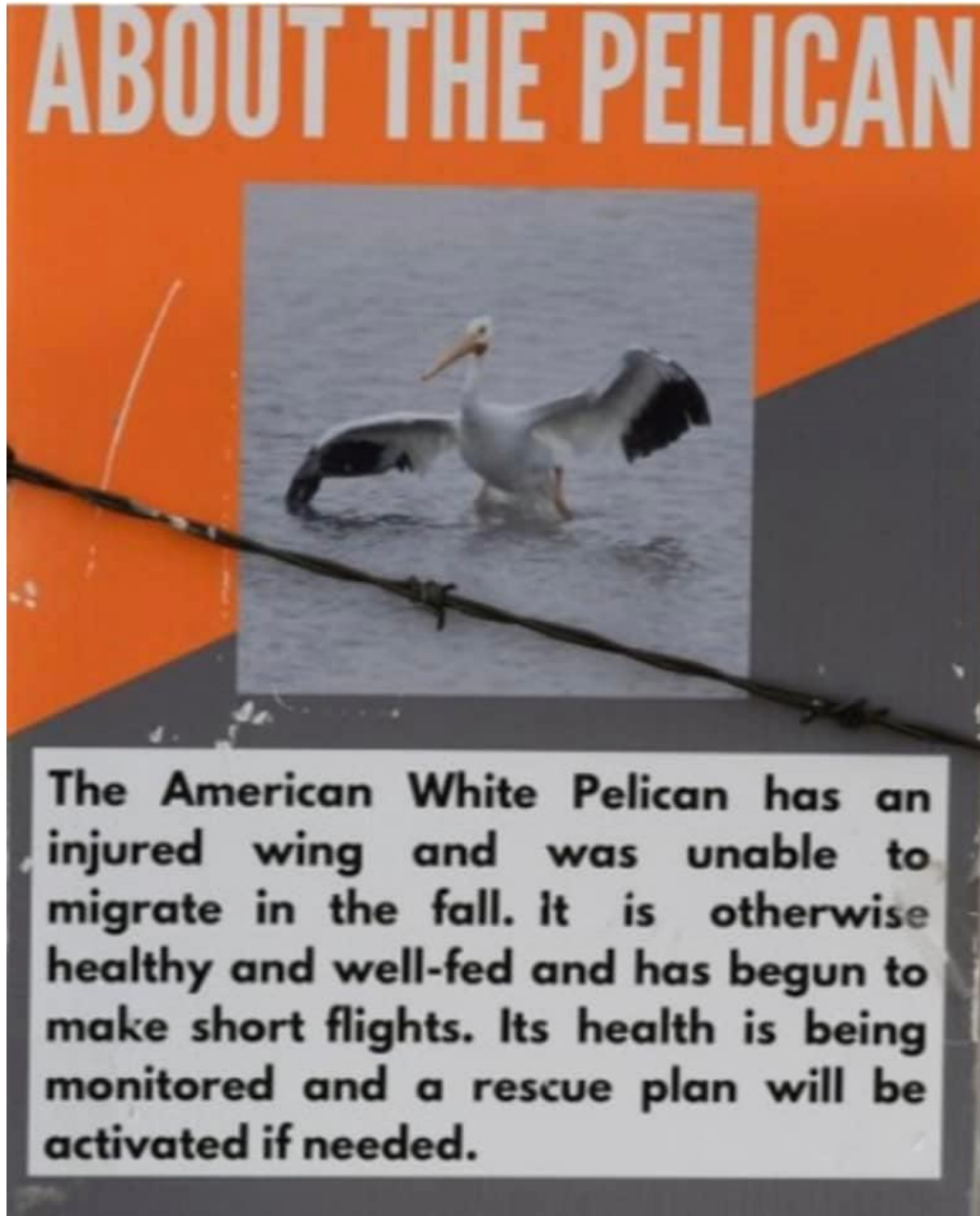
Comment

Her injured wing appears to be the one on her right side. However, if she wants to extend both of her wings fully, she can do that. See my attached photo from Jan. 16.



Comment

The Caretaker for Frank Lake posted a sign at Frank Lake last winter. I'll attach a photo of it to this comment. I have discussed Elsa with him several times, and he still feels the same way. Further, he added that any rescue attempt could result in stress to her and possibly further injury.



January 26, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

Elsa, the overwintering pelican, flew higher and longer today than I've seen her fly since November. Yes, our Elsa! She had been standing in the water southeast of the island at Frank Lake. There were about 12 Common Goldeneyes in the water to the west of her. I saw a Bald Eagle flying after another goldeneye. The goldeneye landed in the water near Elsa. And the eagle landed on the ice somewhat farther away. Elsa decided to swim toward the group of 12 goldeneyes.

Suddenly, all of the goldeneyes and Elsa took flight together. They hadn't gone very far when the goldeneyes formed a tight group and flew past the island to the northwest. Elsa flew fairly low initially by herself. And then she gained a lot of altitude. She went up to around 300 feet. She flew way up over the island and toward the mountains. She soon turned, after she had left Frank Lake, and then she flew back to the lake--past the southern tip of the island and down to where she had been before the eagle landed.

The eagle then seemed to decide that dinner was going to have to wait a while, and it flew way to the north. Meanwhile, Elsa seemed to be happy standing in the water where I first saw her today.

The group of goldeneyes has been at Frank Lake the last few times that I've visited. And I've seen them flying together many times. But today was the first time that I saw Elsa taking flight with them. Maybe my imagination is running wild, but it almost seemed that Elsa was trying to send the eagle a message with her flight: "I am no sitting duck pelican, and my wings can carry me quickly to wherever I wish!"



Comment

Here's another photo of Elsa on her great flight today.



January 29, 2022

📺😊 Elsa Report 😊📺

I was asked by Helen Pike, of the CBC, if she would be able to interview me on camera at Frank Lake—to talk about Elsa, the overwintering pelican, and me, one of her unofficial Alberta Birds reporters. I agreed, of course, and today was the day. We met at the gate at Frank Lake at noon.

It was a very pleasant afternoon, and we had no trouble at all with the temperature, the wind, or the footing. Helen had a backpack with a large video camera, and a tripod. I felt a little guilty with my light camera load—but she seemed to be doing quite well.

As we approached the shore, just down from the pipeline, we could see Elsa flying over the ice south of the island. She landed and decided to go for a swim toward the island. When she got to the island, she walked up to the south tip and used her wings to help her to get to the top. The photo I've attached shows Elsa just as she had gained her perch. I thought that I had caught her in a very balletic pose—showing those wonderful wings, that seem to be getting better and better. She hasn't been on the south tip of the island very much in the recent past. I wondered if the fact that the Bald Eagle that was here recently had anything to do with her positioning—the eagle was standing on the ice in the south when I was here before. I took a few photos. Elsa was quite active today. She flew twice while we were there.

Then Helen and I got into the principal reason that we were visiting Elsa today. She had her video camera set up, and we had an interview. Helen asked questions about various aspects of my Frank Lake/Elsa experience. I hope that I provided appropriate answers. I was talking so much that my lips were getting quite dry—and I had not taken a water bottle with me; I tried licking my lips a lot off camera. Anyway, I was very happy to tell Helen something about how I had decided to drop in on Elsa from time to time. I appreciated having the opportunity to tell my story!

I understood from Helen that our interview will be on CBC Calgary TV tonight at 11:30 pm.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa flying this afternoon.



January 30, 2022

😊Elsa Interview Addendum😊

Helen Pike, the CBC reporter who interviewed me yesterday at Frank Lake, sent me a link to a beautifully written article that she wrote about the interview. It's at the following link: <https://www.cbc.ca/.../elsa-the-pelican-southern-alberta...>

I was very grateful and happy to do the interview. But I was a bit sad when I saw it on CBC Calgary TV last night, because Helen had evidently needed to trim the footage drastically. I had expected that she would have to do a lot of trimming—we talked for 15 minutes or so. However, many of the points, which I had hoped would have been included, had not made it. One of the main ones that bothered me was when I advised people who may wish to see Elsa not to get too close to her. She needs to have everyone respect her space. Well, when Helen put together the article at the above link, she really outdid herself! Everything is there! I was very happy to read her article! Thank you very much, Helen!

I've attached an in flight photo of Elsa that I took yesterday. It was during her second flight. She was flying to the south tip of the island. The flight was particularly interesting to me, because it looked like she was doing pin-point landing practice. Notice that her tail feathers are flared, her wings are spread, her feet have been lowered, and she is trying to land at a specific spot on the island--which she did!

If anyone has not been able to see the interview on TV yet, I've provided a link (there are three ads initially, and the interview is at 14:10):
<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1997749315813>

UPDATE UPDATE UPDATE UPDATE UPDATE UPDATE UPDATE

Please Note: I changed the original link to the CBC video above, because it was not a permanent link. The latest one should work and, hopefully, will continue to work! 😊



February 1, 2022

😊 Elsa Windows Wallpaper for February 😊

As I did on Jan. 17, I have prepared Elsa wallpaper files. I made them for all of the aspect ratios that I did before, and I named them accordingly. All of the files for this month are based on the photo that I posted on the day of the Frank Lake CBC TV interview, on Jan. 29.

I've stored all of the files in the same Dropbox folder that I used last month. Therefore, the same link that I provided before will still work. However, I've provided the Dropbox folder link below as well:

[Alberta Birds Wallpaper](#)

The photo that I've attached to this post is the wallpaper version for PCs (16:9 aspect ratio). You'll need to go to the Dropbox folder if you would like to have the high res file for PCs, iPads, or iPhones.

I look forward to going out to see Elsa, on everyone's behalf, in the next few days!



February 3, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

My first opportunity in February to go to Frank Lake to visit Elsa, the overwintering pelican, was on Feb. 2. According to my weather app, it looked to be darned cold in High River that day. So, I stayed home, right? Wrong! I got in my car and headed to Frank Lake. How bad could it be after all? I parked in front of the gate, and I opened the car door. Woow, the cold took my breath away! Nevertheless, I was there, so I thought that I'd try to make the best of it. I put on my parka and balaclava, grabbed my two-layer mitts and walking poles, strapped on my camera, and I was off. It only took about 200 m past the gate, with -30 wind chill blowing directly in my face, for me to decide that it was a bad idea. I went back to my car. Elsa, keep hunkering down! I'll be back—another day!

Today looked to be not too bad at all. I drove to Frank Lake in the early afternoon. I was getting ready to walk in when [Birthe Parker](#) walked over to me. Ours were the only vehicles there. Birthe had written a lovely piece about Elsa and me in Instagram a few days ago. I thanked her very much at the time. Today, she handed me a longer story that she had written and printed: "Elsa, a Story of Survival—Frank Lake, Alberta." Just wonderful! I hadn't read it when Birthe was there, but I've read it now at home. Thank you very much, Birthe!

I'm always careful as I walk toward the pipeline inflow across the field. If Elsa or any of her duck friends are there, I don't want to scare them. Well, they saw me before I saw them. The ducks flew away, and Elsa swam toward the island. I stayed back, but they were all on their way. I kept walking toward the shore across from the island. Elsa swam for a while near the north end of the island. The ducks (about 20 mallards and golden-eyes, I think) had gathered in the water south of the island. Suddenly, Elsa decided to fly. I only had my 500 mm lens today, so it was difficult to keep up with her. After she went past, she flew down to the water near the ducks. The photo that I've attached shows Elsa just about to land in the water. She eventually swam to the south tip of the island, walked to the upper level, and then hopped and flew up. After that she settled into her usual warming and resting snuggle.

There was another vehicle beside my car when I walked back to the gate. A woman and her two very young kids were getting ready to walk in to see Elsa. She said that her name is Morgan. I wondered if she's an Alberta Birds member. No, she said. But she had read about Elsa in the CBC article, and she was taking her kids in to see her. It wasn't bitterly cold like yesterday, but with a wind chill of -17, it still wasn't very warm. I told Morgan where I last saw Elsa, and I wished them well. They went in, with Morgan carrying the younger child, and the older one walking by her side.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa walking toward the south tip of the island.



Comment

Here's Elsa on top of the island.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa at the beginning of her flight today.



February 7, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

I dropped by Frank Lake to see Elsa, the overwintering pelican, this afternoon. The temperature in High River was 12 when I was there. There was some wind though—my weather app said it was 26 km/hr. I met [Martha Wilson](#) as I was walking across the field. She said that she had seen Elsa flying this afternoon, and she looked fine.

Elsa had evidently decided to get settled on the island, however, by the time that I came. I saw her on the top of the south tip of the island. She was snuggled into her feathers quite thoroughly. I couldn't see her bill at all. I stood on the shore for about two hours, but she only moved her head a bit, and she never changed her position. It looked like she was more relaxed than I have ever seen her.

While I was on the shore, [Donna Glawson](#) and her husband, John, came over. I enjoyed chatting with them for some time. Donna and John have been coming quite frequently to see Elsa.

There were four Common Goldeneyes in the open water at Frank Lake. They were swimming and diving. And they flew a few times. They're not pelican company, but I think that Elsa enjoys having them around. On many occasions, I've seen her swim over to the goldeneyes that were there that day.

I don't have much in the way of photos today. But I'll share a couple of them. The main one I'll post shows Elsa in almost the same position that I saw her in originally today. As I was walking back to my car, Jill ([Isaac Vale](#)) came over to meet me. It was very nice to meet you, Jill!



Comment

Here's a view of the island at Frank Lake. Elsa is way down on the left.



February 9, 2022

😊 Elsa Report 😊

Elsa, the overwintering pelican, was enjoying the warmer temperatures at Frank Lake yesterday (February 8). There was a little wind sometimes while I was there, in the early afternoon, but mostly it was a very pleasant day.

I found Elsa in her usual hunkered down position, but in an unusual location. Her head was out and she was scanning her neighbourhood from time to time. She was on the point of land across from the north tip of the island. Generally, when she rests, she's either on the north or the south tip of the island. Goldeneyes were in the water, swimming and diving, as they almost always have been in the last few months. I counted 13 of them. But, I later found that there were at least 17; that's how many of them flew away together when one of the two Bald Eagles got too close to them.

Elsa didn't seem to be trying to warm up; it seemed like she was just resting. It was evident that she was not bothered by my presence on the shore. But I noticed on two occasions, when other visitors came to the shore, that she stood up. Seemingly, when she was satisfied that they were no threat, she settled down again. Four visitors came by while I was standing on the shore: Susan and Mike Kelly, and Dave and Alice Clark. There were several other visitors who were walking around up from the shore.

The two eagles that I mentioned before were standing on the ice south of the island most of the time. I think that they were hoping that the goldeneyes would fly near them. At one point, I saw one of the eagles flying after the other. I thought that they were just being friendly. However, when I looked at my photos later, I saw that one of the eagles had caught a fish; I guess the other eagle thought that it would be a good idea to share. 😊

I've attached a photo of Elsa standing up and stretching her wings. I think that was probably one of the times that other visitors came to the shore. I noticed that the spots on the back of her neck might be looking a little better than they have been.



Comment

Here's a photo of the 17 Common Goldeneyes that flew when one of the Bald Eagles got too close to them.



Comment

Here's one of the eagles with a fish, and the other eagle is right behind.



Comment

Here's another photo of Elsa with the glistening ice behind her.



Comment

And here's one more photo of Elsa.



February 11, 2022

😊🧊Elsa Report🧊😊

I visited Elsa, the overwintering pelican, today. I went a bit earlier than usual, in the hope of catching her fishing. I was happy to see [Donna Glawson](#) and John arriving at the Frank Lake gate parking area. We started walking in together. They got sidetracked along the way, however, because they were attracted to some approaching dogs and their owners on the gravel road.

As I approached the pipeline from the field, I could see that Elsa was on the south tip of the island. She was standing up facing south. Although I was too far away, I took a couple of pictures.

Then I made my way down the path to the shore opposite Elsa. By that time, she was all snuggled in on top of the rock. The wind had become quite significant. My weather app showed that at High River the wind was 27 km/hr. So, even though the temperature was around 0, it felt much colder. I was glad that I had grabbed my balaclava and parka.

Donna and John soon arrived near me.

There were five Canada Geese in the water and on the ice southeast of the island. They abruptly flew away—but not far. They came right back to where they had been. I guess that they felt the need to have a quick look around the lake. But they evidently decided that where they had been was where they ought to be. Later, another pair joined them.

There are usually Common Goldeneye ducks at Frank Lake in the open water near the island. But I hadn't seen any today. As I was thinking about them, out of the east, 12 goldeneyes appeared. They banked around and landed in the water on the west side of the island.

Donna, John, and I were there for well over an hour, but Elsa seemed to have gotten too comfortable to move much. She looked good—all fluffed up, with her feather duvet giving her protection from the blustery wind. The three of us decided that it was time for us to get out of the wind as well. We bid adieu to Elsa.

I've attached one of my photos of Elsa—she looked like she was wondering, since we had a choice, why we were all standing there on the shore for so long in the cold wind.



February 13, 2022

😊👁️ Elsa Report 👁️😊

Today, when I visited Elsa, the overwintering pelican, at Frank Lake, I saw lots of Elsa watchers north of the island. It looked like they were being quite respectful though. I've attached a photo I took when I was by the pipeline. Elsa is at the left edge of my photo on the island. There are a few Canada Geese in the water also. I saw more geese today than I had seen before at Frank Lake this year—I think there were around sixty of them. Most of them were gathered way to the southeast of the island. There were about 10 Common Goldeneyes and one Common Merganser also. To be sure, Elsa was not alone on this Super Bowl Sunday.

As I walked down to the shore, Elsa made her way to the south tip of the island. When she arrived there, she hunkered down and stayed that way. I've attached a couple of my photos in the comments.

There were a few Canada Goose pairs swimming near the island and walking on the island. It looked like they were beginning to scout out appropriate places for nesting. I don't think that the island is going to be viewed as a good place to nest next month, however—since most likely there will be many California Gulls on the island; and they like to try to steal goose eggs.

And I've placed a few more photos of Canada Goose pairs swimming near the island.



Comment

Here's a photo of one of the many Canada Goose pairs that I saw today.



Comment

I took a photo of Elsa when she had just arrived at the south tip of the island. She was quite far away at the time. There's a goldeneye in the water below.



Comment

On this Super Bowl Sunday, I like to think about this photo as showing Elsa all curled up in a "super ball".



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa with a Canada Goose pair.



Comment

There was a lot of hissing and honking going on as the Canada Goose pairs were swimming and walking around.



February 15, 2022

😊😬 Elsa Report 😬😊

I went to visit Elsa, the overwintering pelican, at Frank Lake today. I didn't see her initially. Something I did see disturbed me. There was a guy on the point across from the north tip of the island sitting down with his camera and tripod. There was little that he could take a picture of except a few goldeneyes and some Canada geese. Elsa had gone down to the south tip of the island, and I doubted that she would venture anywhere near the guy with the camera. On other occasions, I've seen people walking down to where the guy was sitting. When they do that, Elsa simply goes somewhere else—typically to the south point of the island.

I sent an email to Greg Wagner, the Caretaker for Frank Lake, tonight. I asked him if it would be possible to place a sign on the other side of the pipeline requesting that people not walk on that side (i.e., west of the pipeline) while Elsa is trying to survive the winter. It seems reasonable to me, because if people do walk there, they are not going to get a good view of Elsa—she's just going to go somewhere else. The shore down from the pipeline, across the water east of the island, is a long, perfectly good vantage point, and Elsa doesn't seem to feel threatened.

After the guy with the camera left today, Elsa flew southeast of the island. And then she swam beside the island to the location where the guy had been sitting. She went up on the land and settled down. She looked quite contented.

I've attached a photo of Elsa leaving the south tip of the island on her flight this afternoon.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa flying this afternoon.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa swimming this afternoon.



Comment

And here's Elsa just down from where the guy with the camera was sitting--after he left.



February 18, 2022

😊👉 Elsa Report 👈😊

When I checked my iPhone weather app, it indicated that the temperature was -6 in High River, with a 23 km/hr wind—giving a wind chill of -13. It didn't seem like it should be too bad. I've been out in much worse conditions at Frank Lake. So, I decided to visit Elsa, the over wintering pelican.

I don't know whether conditions had changed, by the time I parked my car in front of the locked gate, but it felt bone-chillingly coooold when I opened my car door! I grabbed my balaclava and parka, and I put on my two-layer mitts.

Except for the wind blowing directly in my face, the walk in wasn't too bad. When I walk across the field, I always scan the area for Elsa, so that I don't startle her. I saw her just down from the pipeline. She was standing in the water with a Canada Goose pair. The river and effluent streams from the pipeline at Frank Lake are a little warmer than the water downstream. Even a little warmth is no doubt very welcome by the water birds.

I remained up from the shore on one of the paths, and I took a few pictures. I was unable to leave my fingers uncovered for more than a few minutes. Elsa appeared to be fine, and she didn't seem to be concerned at all that I was there. The geese decided that they would fly toward a gathering of about 50-60 other geese farther downstream near the two islands. There was no point to my staying there, because I didn't want to disturb Elsa and "the goose gang" any further. I hoped that I had a few photos that I could show you, but I wasn't sure that was the case—since sometimes I couldn't see through my viewfinder; and checking my shots was out of the question.

I've attached a photo of Elsa warming her "tootsies" in the comparatively warm water. In the comments, I'll put a shot of Elsa and the Canada Goose pair before they flew.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa and a pair of Canada Geese.



February 20, 2022

😊 A Proposed Sign to Help Elsa 😊

As I mentioned in a previous post, I asked the Caretaker for Frank Lake about the installation of a sign about respecting Elsa's space. He replied that he thinks that a sign might help. In order to get permission to have a sign, I sent the following note to Ducks Unlimited Canada, the owner of the land at the Frank Lake Conservation Area:

To: Ducks Unlimited Canada

Re: The overwintering pelican at Frank Lake

I have been regularly monitoring and taking photos of the overwintering pelican at Frank Lake since November 20, 2021. I post photos and commentary in Facebook for the Alberta Birds group.

We have taken to referring to the pelican as Elsa and her gender as female. I've noticed that visitors to Frank Lake, who wish to get a better look at Elsa, sometimes try to walk too close to her. This action causes Elsa to fly to the south end of the second island, where she cannot take advantage of the warmer water, and the fishing is not as good. She might get somewhat stressed also, when people get too close. I think that it would be preferable if visitors would give Elsa more space.

I've asked Greg Wagner, the Caretaker for Frank Lake, about putting up a sign to try to encourage visitors to stay somewhat away from Elsa. He said "I think a sign might help limit people getting too close." Last winter, Liz Soria placed a sign by the pipeline, to tell visitors about the pelican, and to mention that it was being monitored. I would like to have a sign this year, so that Elsa might have a better chance to survive the winter.

Would Ducks Unlimited mind if we were to place a sign by the pipeline requesting that visitors not get too close to Elsa? I propose something like "Please Respect The Pelican's Space."

It would be great if people would refrain from walking on the north island entirely, and only walk on the shore east of the second island. But I would rather propose a sign that has a positive message and is not overly complex.

If a sign would be acceptable, please let me know if you have any guidelines for its construction and installation.

I look forward to your early reply.

Thank you,
John Reasbeck

I've attached a photo of a possible sign that we might consider using. Please let me know if anyone has any ideas about making and installing a suitable sign—such as no picture, different wording, larger letters etc. Also, do you think that a sign would indeed be a good idea? The sign that I would get printed, from my photo, would take about a week or two to get (from Costco) and would be 16" X 20"; obviously, we would then need to make it weatherproof, mount it, and install it properly. Maybe it would be better if someone were to paint a sign. If anyone would like to help, that would be great—I don't know much about sign construction or installation.

Please
Respect
The
Pelican's
Space!



February 24, 2022

😊 Signs for Elsa 😊

I haven't visited Elsa lately, but I have been somewhat busy on Elsa's behalf. As I said four days ago, I asked Ducks Unlimited for permission to place a sign or signs at Frank Lake by the pipeline outflow. I ended up making three signs. The Ducks Unlimited rep said that they are all OK, but he wanted me to add a statement in large letters at the top of one of the signs: "Please Do Not Disturb the Pelican". I did that. The other signs advise visitors where to avoid walking and where to walk for the best views of Elsa and the other birds near the islands. Ducks Unlimited gave me permission to install all of the signs at the pipeline outflow.

I sent an email to Leigh Lambert at Signmasters. Leigh is very responsive and sent me various questions and concerns immediately. I'm quite in over my head about sign mounting, utility line marking, and other considerations. If anyone with appropriate expertise in this area would care to lend a hand, I would appreciate it.

I've attached a photo of the first sign that will be installed.

By the way, I changed my profile photo to that of a kitty that used to live with us. Dear Sammi left us, unfortunately, in 2005. The reason that I changed my photo is that there has been a lot of scamming going on. It turns out, from analysis that I've done, that the problems don't have anything to do with hacking Facebook accounts. Rather, they stem from unscrupulous people impersonating Facebook accounts in Instagram. There is one of me, complete with my former profile photo. I've reported it five times. The scammers harvest the names of friends if their names aren't protected (mine are now), and then they proceed to try to scam them from the impersonated account using Facebook Messenger.

Please Do Not Disturb the Pelican

About the pelican:

American white pelicans normally migrate in October from Alberta to the southern U.S. states and Mexico.

One pelican (she has been named Elsa) did not migrate from Frank Lake in either 2020 or 2021, due to having an injured wing. Therefore, she had to spend the winter at Frank Lake.

Elsa has greatly improved her flying ability this winter, as compared to last winter.

She has access to open water through the winter because of the pipeline. She eats fish, she watches for predators, she exercises, and she keeps herself warm by snuggling into her feathers.

By staying well away from Elsa, you will be helping her to survive.



February 26, 2022

🧐Elsa Report🧐

It was a lovely afternoon yesterday at Frank Lake. I was there with [Jack Sluys](#), who has been helping me with the installation of the signs that are being made. We visited Elsa, of course, but we also wanted to decide where we could place the signs about Elsa when we get them from Signmasters—which should be next week.

Elsa was snuggled into her feathers on the south tip of her island abode. She stayed in that position all of the time that we watched from the shore. Jack and I took a few photos, trying to do justice to the great light--and showing Elsa, of course. I'll attach one of my photos--notice the pelican footprints leading to Elsa's spot.

We observed, as we were leaving, that the ice had crept to the island on the west side. We also saw that a fisherman was walking over the ice toward the island. Even though Elsa had appeared to be dozing, she was well aware of the ice presence. I have a photo of her standing and looking directly toward the person on the ice—I'll put that photo in the comments. We were not too concerned, because we had spoken with the fisherman when he was at the pipeline, and he was well aware of Elsa being at the other end of the island. Elsa decided that he was not a threat, and she went back to snuggle in her feathers again.

There were about 35 water birds northeast of the island—there was a mix of Canada Geese, a couple of mallards, and a few goldeneyes. I'll put an in flight photo of one of the goldeneyes in the comments.



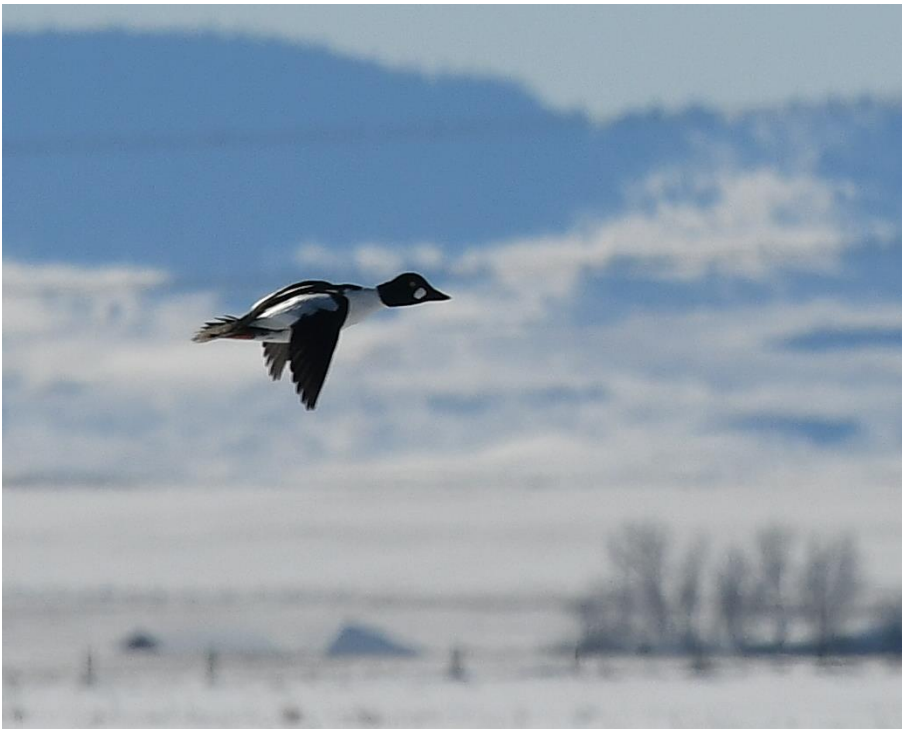
Comment

Here's my photo of Elsa, standing up and looking at the fisherman who was walking across the ice.



Comment

And here's a photo of one of the goldeneyes flying northwest of the island.



February 28, 2022

😊👉Elsa Report👈😊

Although the temperature was about 7 degrees above zero yesterday (Sunday) at Frank Lake, the wind was quite high; my weather app said that it was 40 km/hr in High River. I walked in anyway, clutching my walking poles to help me over the field and down to the shore.

Elsa had been up on the south tip of the island. But she decided to get down and swim upstream in the direction of the pipeline. The wind didn't seem to bother her much, although she had to tack into it like a sailboat at times. I went back up to the path to give her some space. Elsa had decided to do some fishing at the outflow. I noticed that she was making good use of her pouch—she had it expanded more than I had ever seen. I don't know whether she got any fish or not, but she was being very persistent. I didn't stay too long because the wind was making it difficult for me to hold my camera steady. I've attached one of my photos.

I noticed a post and some wire in the water just down from the pipeline. I'll try to find out if someone would be able to get that material out of there. Hopefully, I'll get the signs I designed next week, so that [Jack Sluys](#) and I can put them up.



February 28, 2022

😊 Elsa Windows and iDevice Wallpaper for March 😊

As I've done in the previous two months, I've prepared wallpaper files of Elsa using different aspect ratios. I've placed the high res versions in my Dropbox folder as before. The files can be found at the following link:

[Alberta_Birds_Wallpaper](#)

I've included two sets this month. One set is based on a photo of Elsa standing--I used that photo on one of the signs that Jack Sluys and I will be installing at Frank Lake. The other set shows Elsa flying. I took both of the photos on Feb. 15/22. I've attached a small version of the inflight PC wallpaper file—I've left enough room on the left of both PC wallpaper files so that the same photo could be used for a Zoom background on a PC.

April will be the last month that I will make these files. If anyone has any suggestions for photos of Elsa, or if there are other aspect ratios that you would like, please let me know.



Comment

Here's the other 16:9 aspect ratio version.



March 2, 2022

😬 Elsa Report 😬

A lot of melting was going on at Frank Lake. There were quite a few puddles and muddy patches on the gravel road as I walked in yesterday afternoon. There was still quite a bit of ice on the paths over the field, however. I saw Canada Geese in several areas on the lake: to the north and south of the island (which really is an island again 😊). I made a rough count of the geese, and I think that there were about 250. There was incessant honking, as you might imagine.

Elsa was on top of the south end of the island. She was snuggled down, but not entirely—because I could still see her head and bill. The shore opposite the island was wet and muddy. The temperature was 9 degrees with a pleasant bit of breeze.

Suddenly, almost all of the geese north of the island took to the air. Then most of the geese in the south did the same. The reason for the flights became evident: a Bald Eagle was flying over the lake from the east, about 200 feet above the island. Elsa stayed down for a minute or so. Then she raised herself up to have a look around. She abruptly flew west. She flew toward some clouds—higher than I had seen her fly before. After she had been up for 30-40 seconds, she circled around and came back southeast of the island. Then she flew lower as she approached the island and landed approximately where she had begun her flight. I wondered whether had she decided that she was better in the air with the eagle around; and, while she was up, she could satisfy herself that the eagle had gone somewhere else.

Meanwhile, the geese seemed to feel that the coast was clear, and they started to return. Over a span of about 15-20 minutes they flew back from various directions. As they landed, the honking resumed. Elsa returned as well, and she seemed to have been calmed.

I was reading a bit about Bald Eagles and the maximum weight that they can fly with. The website <https://www.forestwildlife.org/how-much-weight-can-an-.../> states that on the average an eagle can carry only about 3-4 lbs. Therefore, they're reluctant to attack large birds like Canada Geese or American White Pelicans. They would rather pick on smaller birds like ducks, gulls, or shorebirds. But, I don't blame Elsa and the geese for not wanting to make themselves available. 😊

I've attached a photo of Elsa just before she flew. I'll provide five more photos of her in the comments: they're progressive glimpses of Elsa as she seemingly satisfied herself that the eagle was no longer a threat, landed back on the island, and then walked back to a good hunkering down spot.



Comment

Here's Elsa just after she had taken to the air.



Comment

And here's a photo of Elsa flying high over the lake.



Comment

Seemingly, satisfied that the eagle had gone, Elsa circled back to the island.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa just after she had landed back on the island.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa walking to a good spot for hunkering down again on the island.



March 5, 2022

😊🖼️Elsa Report🖼️😊

Today was Elsa sign installation day at Frank Lake. [Leigh Lambert](#), of Signmasters, said some time ago that she would manufacture the signs that I designed and donate them. She did that--very quickly. And they're wonderful! I received them by expedited Canada Post on Friday—complete with all manner of screws, bolts, and washers.

[Jack Sluys](#) has been working with me on this effort. I contacted him right away after the signs had arrived. He had already completed making the sign mounts that he thought would work well. He sent me a photo. They looked great! We decided that we would get together at noon today and get the signs up. Reflecting on our meeting, I decided that it might be nice for Jack to do the initial sign mounting at home, if he wanted to do that, rather than having to do everything today. So, we met, and I gave him the signs.

Jack had the signs leaning against the Frank Lake gate when I arrived today. He had fastened 2X4s to the sign mounts for ease of installation on the posts—and so that the signs would have good visibility. Jack had brought along a sled that he used to transport his tools, his camera, and the signs.

We made our way down the road and across the field. On the way, we could see Elsa standing up on the south tip of the island. Elsa had a lot of company today: about 100 Canada Geese, and a few Common Goldeneyes. When we arrived at the pipeline, Jack went into action. Using power drills, he made two holes in each 2X4 and fastened each of them to posts above the pipeline using 6" wood screws. So slick! He finished in hardly any time at all!

What a pleasure it was to work on this project with two such capable professionals as [Leigh Lambert](#) and [Jack Sluys](#)! Thank you very much, Leigh and Jack! Thank you also to all of our members who commented on my post in which I suggested having signs; I considered all of your very helpful suggestions in my designs. So many members wanted to donate, and I thank you all for that too--but such donations are not needed. And, finally, thank you to Kade McCormick, of Ducks Unlimited, for your wording suggestion, and for permission to erect the signs. I'll attach a photo of the centre sign to this post. Then I'll attach photos of the two surrounding signs in comments.



Please Do Not Disturb the Pelican

About the pelican:

American white pelicans normally migrate in October from Alberta to the southern U.S. states and Mexico.

One pelican (she has been named Elsa) did not migrate from Frank Lake in either 2020 or 2021, due to having an injured wing. Therefore, she had to spend the winter at Frank Lake.

Elsa has greatly improved her flying ability this winter, as compared to last winter.

She has access to open water through the winter because of the pipeline. She eats fish, she watches for predators, she exercises, and she keeps herself warm by snuggling into her feathers.

By staying well away from Elsa, you will be helping her to survive.



Comment

This sign was installed to the left of the first sign.



Comment

And this sign was installed to the right of the first sign.



March 6, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

Yesterday, at Frank Lake, after [Jack Sluys](#) and I had installed the signs (please see my previous post) that [Leigh Lambert](#) had prepared for us, we went down to the shore to see how Elsa was doing. She had been standing up as we approached the pipeline with the signs. But now she was down in her resting position at the south tip of the island. The temperature was around 0 degrees, and there was hardly any wind. Occasionally, the sun would peak around the clouds. The water in the lake was quite still. It was a very pleasant afternoon.

Abruptly, catching both Jack and me off guard, Elsa decided that she would make a brief flight. She flew east from the island toward us, and then she headed in the direction of the power towers north of the island. She was flying at about the same height as the towers, but she was not in any danger of hitting any of the cables. She circled around in the west and flew down to the water southeast of the island. I took some photos as she was flying and landing. It's very impressive when you see a pelican land in the water. They take full advantage of their 9-foot wingspan, and they tilt up their totipalmate feet (having webbing that connects all four of their toes) to land in the water like an amphibious airplane on its pontoons. I've attached a photo I took just as Elsa landed.

After landing, Elsa swam to the island, past the dozens of Canada Geese and a few Common Goldeneyes that were enjoying the mild winter day. She went onto the island, and she walked and flapped her way to just below the tip of the upper level of the island. Then she made a wing-aided jump to the top, looked around, and settled down—apparently satisfied that everything was in order in her domain.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa as she was coming down to land in the water.



March 9, 2022

😬Elsa Report😬

I don't have a photo of Elsa from my visit to Frank Lake today. Instead, I'll attach a photo of Elsa from our sign installation day last Saturday.

So, why is there no photo from today? It's because I didn't see Elsa today. [Greg Wagner](#) told me yesterday that Elsa was not there. And [Jack Sluys](#) confirmed that later.

I was at Frank Lake for 2 ½ hours today, and I looked carefully everywhere around the island that Elsa usually rests on. No Elsa. Not even so much as a white feather that I could see. I talked with both Greg and Jack. Here's what we think is going on:

1. We don't think that anything terrible has necessarily happened to Elsa.
2. We think that Elsa is using a strategy that got her through the previous winter (remembered by Greg).
3. Last winter, on a few days, Elsa decided to hide during the day.
4. Then, at night, she would return to the island.
5. The reason that she might be using that same behaviour this winter is that the ice has advanced to the south end of the island.
6. Since she may be feeling unsafe during the day, when a predator could walk across the ice, she hides.
7. Then, under cover of darkness, she returns to her winter home on the island.

Jack and I will continue to go to Frank Lake during the day, from time to time—especially when it gets warmer and the ice recedes, and there's water all around the island. We suspect that when the island seems to be safe again, Elsa will return to remain there during the day.

Maybe we're wrong. Maybe she has just found another place where there's open water and fish. Or, maybe something unthinkable happened. But, we're hoping for the best.



March 12, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

Elsa is back! As we suspected, it would seem that she had just been hiding for a few days. She looks well fed, so she was probably flying back every day, perhaps at dusk, to have fish. She probably remained on her island for the night. Then she would return to her secret hiding place (maybe after breakfast 😊), where she spent the day. Thus, if there were any coyotes, that came across the ice during the day, when the ice was touching the island, she could not be found. All of the foregoing is conjecture, because no one saw her during the day, and no one saw her coming or going.

As I noted, in a previous post, I was at Frank Lake for 2 ½ hours on Mar. 9. I searched everywhere along both islands from the shore. And, I walked up to the observation blind and looked around there as well. On Mar. 11, [Greg Wagner](#) and [Jack Sluys](#) were doing some work on the east side of the lake. They said that they would have a look there. They didn't see Elsa.

I had planned to go to Frank Lake today. I was just having breakfast when I received a text message from Greg Wagner at 9:42am. He informed me that Elsa is back! I got ready to leave right away, and I was out at Frank Lake by 11:30. [Renee Carrier](#) saw me as I parked. She had just been across the field to see Elsa. She said that she saw her fishing. The road in has started to get a bit messy. That probably means that the gate will not be unlocked for a while. Ducks Unlimited doesn't like to unlock the gate when it's all wet and muddy, because the gravel road deteriorates badly.

As I crossed the field, I could see around 300 Canada Geese. Initially, I didn't see Elsa anywhere. But Renee said that she had seen her go to the island that's closest to the pipeline. So, I looked for her there. She was at the southern most tip, in her usual resting position. I walked to the shore and took a few photos. The geese were honking non-stop. They were in many places in the lake basin. There were some Common Goldeneyes and Mallards there too. And, for the first time this year, I saw two California Gulls. Spring is starting to happen!

Once again, I spent 2 ½ hours on the shore. I would have liked to get a photo of Elsa swimming, flying, or even standing. But she was content to just hunker down. And, really, I didn't mind that at all, because after not seeing Elsa for a week, it was wonderful to be able to see her once again! While I was there, [Don Whittaker](#) and Val came by. It was great to have their company. They stayed for a bit after I left.

I've attached one of my photos of our Elsa—back from her secret hiding place! With the warmer weather, maybe she won't feel the need to hide again—and her friends should be joining her in a few weeks. Looking good, Elsa! Hang in there! 😊



Comment

This is what the overall scene looked like. There were many more geese and a few ducks in different places.



Comment

Elsa seems to be quite comfortable in this photo. She looked like she was feeling very safe and happy to be back.



Comment

A Common Goldeneye is a small diving duck. The males are black and white. The female has a brown head. I'll attach a photo I took yesterday of a male flying over Frank Lake.



Comment

A California Gull is a fairly large gull with red and black on the tip of its lower bill and a dark eye. I'll attach a photo I took yesterday at Frank Lake.



March 15, 2022

π Elsa Report π

Since yesterday was Pi Day (3.14), I thought that I would use the symbol for the Greek letter pi in my heading 😊.

I tried to get up early (for me) yesterday morning, so that I could be at Frank Lake at a good time to catch Elsa being somewhat active. Even though I was there before noon, Elsa had already hunkered down on the south tip of the island.

Frank Lake is starting to come very much alive with birds. In addition to our American White Pelican, there must have been over 500 Canada Geese, probably 50 ducks of various kinds, about 30 California Gulls, and a Bald Eagle.

Elsa looked like she was trying to ignore the honking, quacking, shrieking, and other confusion. Mostly, she was all covered up with feathers—even her bill—for all of the time I was standing on the shore.

The geese had assembled in many groups and pairs. They swam about and most of them left eventually—probably to get some food in a nearby farm field. At one point, in a group that had about 20 geese, two males (presumably) decided to square off. The other geese clustered around the pair as though it were a schoolyard confrontation. There was lots of splashing and wing flapping.

The gulls were flying around and fishing—mostly not very effectively. Although I saw two gulls get fish. One of them managed to swallow its fish, although it looked like the fish wouldn't fit in its throat. The other successful gull didn't even try to swallow the large fish that it caught.

The eagle perched on some rocks near about 30 geese. They didn't seem nervous at all. There were no ducks near the eagle—they make a point of staying well away. The eagle decided to fly past Elsa to north of the island. The gulls could pick up fishing pointers from the eagle. It flew low and suddenly dove into the water. It came up with a good size fish, which it carried to the ice and ate.

The photo I've attached shows Elsa being quite alert as the eagle flew past. Just as the eagle is not terribly interested in geese, because of their size, so a pelican can also feel relatively safe. Nevertheless, when an eagle flies near her, Elsa takes notice.



Comment

Here's the way Elsa was most of the time I was standing on the shore. I happened to catch two geese flying by her in this shot.



Comment

Here's a California Gull and a fish that looked to be too large--but it managed to swallow it.



Comment

And here's the eagle with its catch.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa in a slightly different resting position than in my comment above.



Comment

The geese yesterday didn't seem to be too concerned.



Comment

I saw many pintails also.



March 16, 2022

😊 Elsa Report 😊

I parked at the Frank Lake gate just before noon today. The sky looked great. Yes, there were some clouds, but the sun was peeking out well. As I walked in on the gravel road, I was happy to find that there was hardly any mud and no snow at all. The well-worn path across the field was a bit wet in places, but the footing was no problem.

Canada Geese were out in force—as they have been for some time. There were more ducks than there have been. In addition to Common Goldeneyes and Northern Pintails, there were some Common Mergansers. Elsa was standing up on the first island. Maybe I should start referring to the two islands the way they do in New Zealand—i.e. north and south islands—especially since the north island is really an island now, with the warmer weather. Elsa's usual island is the south island, but today she was on the north island. She seems to do that when the weather is nice.

I hadn't even walked down to the shore when Elsa decided to jump down and go into the water. I stayed up on the high path, because I could see that she was going to swim up the channel toward the pipeline—I didn't want to discourage her from doing that, because I know that she likes to fish in the channel. Elsa only swam about half way to the pipeline. She suddenly thrust her head under the water. She didn't come up with anything, but she kept doing that, and she managed to get quite a few fish. Normally, a pelican will eat about 4 lbs of fish in a day.

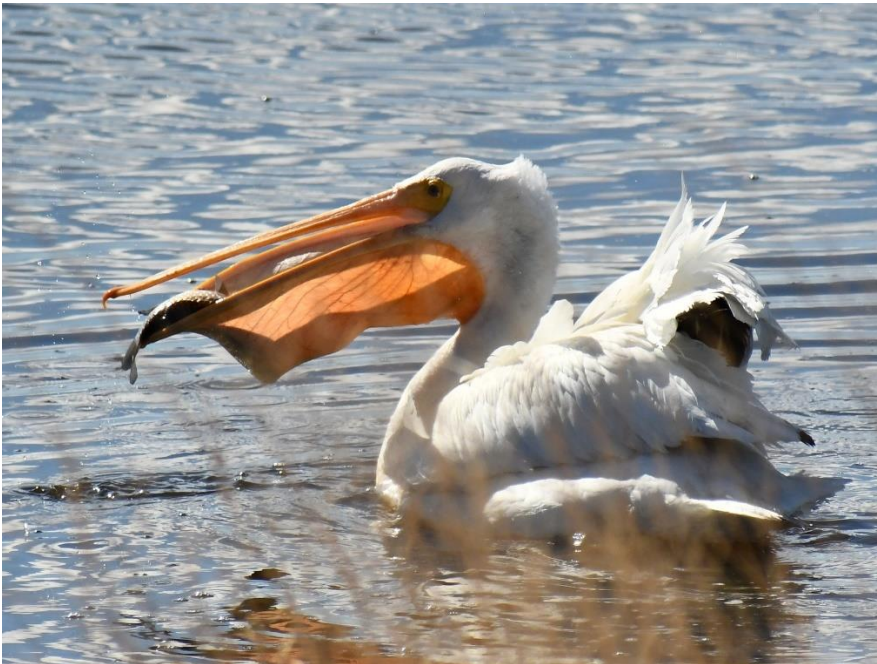
When she had finished her lunch, Elsa swam back to the south tip of the north island. All the while she was fishing, the geese kept up their honking. Most of the geese were in the water or on the ice at various places in the lake basin. Occasionally, there was a skirmish as some geese got too close to a pair that had decided to defend a space on the south island or on the shore. There was an interesting scene on the north island. A pair of geese ran at a single goose that retreated quickly toward the south end where Elsa was. As the goose got closer, Elsa opened her bill. Then, when the goose got closer still, and didn't take the hint, Elsa extended her wings and opened her bill wide. The goose quickly got down from the island and into the water.

The photo I've attached shows Elsa after she had finished her fishing. She was getting ready to return to her spot on the south end of the north island. I'll put another photo in the comments of Elsa catching a sizable fish—which required that she open her pouch and then drain the water—and swallow the fish, of course. I'll put another photo in the comments also, which shows the confrontation with the goose on the north island.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa catching a good size fish.



Comment

And here's a photo of Elsa persuading a goose to get out of her space.



Comment

She couldn't fly well enough to migrate last October, but her flying has dramatically improved. I'll attach a photo from Mar. 1.



March 17, 2022

🍀Elsa and Company🍀

Since it's St. Patrick's Day, and since I'm not planning on going to Frank Lake today, I thought that I would share a few more photos from my trip yesterday. I took way too many photos, and I didn't want to keep all of them just to myself. So, I'll present my favourite overflow shot first, and then I'll put a few more in comments.

My main photo shows Elsa on her way to do some fishing. The water was nicely wavy, and I thought it provided an interesting reflection.

Some California Gulls have paired up already at Frank Lake. As in previous years, they may nest on one of the islands frequented by Elsa, her pelican friends, Canada Geese, Ring-billed Gulls, and Double-crested Cormorants. I'll put a photo of a pair of gulls doing what I call "smoochy-smoochy." Notice the heart shape that their necks provide.

I rarely post photos of Canada Geese flying, because it's such a frequent occurrence. However, the one I've placed in the comments provides a good look at a pair that's going to join the several hundred that were already at Frank Lake yesterday. Hopefully, I'll be able to get a photo of swans flying like that soon.

Canada Geese fly in and out frequently at Frank Lake. For the most part, I don't think that Elsa minds their company, but sometimes they fly quite close to her—as the photo I'll place in comments shows.

Some of the fish that Elsa scoops up are very large. My next photo in comments shows just such a fish, which is about to go down the hatch. It's always intriguing the way that pelicans are able to instantly expand their pouches to accommodate huge volumes when they scoop.

The next photo that I've provided in comments shows Elsa's right wing a bit better than the one I posted yesterday as my main photo. Both shots are at a bit of a strange angle, and the right wing is bent a little, but I think that this one looks more normal than yesterday's photo.



Comment

This photo shows a pair of California Gulls doing what I call "smoochy-smoochy" behaviour.



Comment

Here's a pair of Canada Geese flying into Frank Lake yesterday.



Comment

Elsa is keeping her head down in this shot, when some geese flew quite close to her.



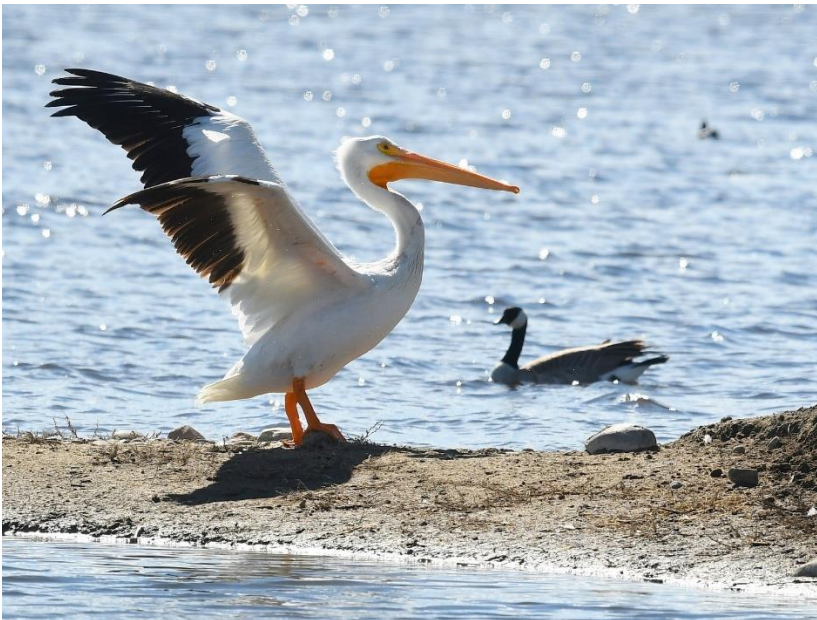
Comment

Elsa had good fishing yesterday. This photo shows a fish in her pouch that was definitely worth her effort.



Comment

And for my final comments photo from my trip to Frank Lake yesterday, here's a photo that I took just after the one I posted as my main photo yesterday. I think it shows her right wing a bit better than yesterday's shot.



March 18, 2022

😊🐟 Elsa Report 🐟😊

I didn't make it out to Frank Lake until 1:50pm today. The gate was still locked—as it likely will be until early April. The temperature was 9 deg, and the wind was about 13 km/hr from the south. Fairly mild, but it was still brisk enough that I wasn't even tempted to leave my jacket in the car. It was cloudy, but my weather app said that there should be some sun later.

As I started walking in, I could see a couple of visitors getting ready to come in after me. They were behind, but soon caught up. A man had walking poles and was not walking as fast as his female companion, who was ahead. Nevertheless, the two of them were moving pretty well. The road continues to be quite good, with only a little mud here and there.

The two visitors were almost across the field by the time I started across. There was the usual honking and shrieking din from the Canada Geese and the California Gulls. Wave after wave of geese and ducks came and went. I declined to try to count how many there were. Northern Pintails, Mallards, and Common Goldeneyes seemed to be the predominant flying duck species.

I located Elsa on the south tip of the north island. She had both goose and gull company on the island. Most of the birds that were not in the water or on the ice were on the south island. I wondered if Elsa was going to stay lying down for hours like she does sometimes. I didn't go to the shore initially, because the man with the walking poles was there taking pictures just across from Elsa. I was able to get some good ones from the path up from the shore anyway. With the sun starting to come out, I wondered if it might be nice enough for Elsa to come down and do some fishing.

Before too long the couple who had preceded me left to walk back to the road. Then I went down to the shore. It had gotten quite soft and mucky. The terrain was a bit deceiving too, because some parts of the shore didn't look too bad until I took a step and sank into the mud. It's a bit disconcerting to stand there taking pictures and feel yourself slowly sinking. But I was eventually able to find some places where it wasn't too bad.

Elsa got up and flapped her wings a little. And she eventually decided that she would come down and swim up the channel to do some fishing. I followed her from the high path. And I was able to get quite a few fishing shots—I'll put some of them in comments; Elsa seems to be doing alright with her fishing.

Before I post, I want to comment on the walking poles that the male visitor had. He left without his poles—they were leaning up against some of the heavy foliage on the shore. I took the poles and stuck them into some strands of wire by our signs just up from the pipeline. I figured that the man or his companion would return. Sure enough, as I was taking some photos of the gulls fishing, I could see the female visitor walking briskly across the field toward the pipeline. I pointed out her partner's walking poles by the signs.

One more thing I wanted to mention. The Bald Eagle was there too. The eagle doesn't have it as easy as he/she did before though. Because there is now a defending air force

with the presence of the gulls. They were taking turns diving at the eagle and coming up from behind. The eagle went away.

The shot I've attached to this post shows Elsa after she had returned down the channel. She decided to bypass the north island and go to the south one. I show her as she has just attained the south tip of the island. It was a great time for her to switch islands because the gulls and geese had gone away from her favourite place on the south tip.



Comment

Elsa had good fishing today. I don't know how many fish are in this pouchful.



Comment

Elsa has scooped up two or three more in this shot.



Comment

Here's a shot of a fish flipping around in her pouch. It didn't escape though.



Comment

Elsa has scooped up two or three more in this shot.



Comment

I thought that this one was quite an interesting perspective. It shows Elsa, from behind, doing a pouch inversion to exercise her pouch muscles.



Comment

And here is Elsa swimming, as she is just about to start fishing.



March 20, 2022

🌻 Elsa Extras 🌻

It's late in the day, but Happy First Day of Spring! I didn't go to see Elsa today at Frank Lake. So I thought that I would post a few more of my photos from Mar. 18.

When I first arrived to visit Elsa, she was resting on the south tip of the north island. Some California Gulls were on the island also. Quite often there are one or two gulls that like to be close to Elsa. There were two gulls yesterday that persisted in being only about six feet away from her. I've seen Elsa stay in her resting position for a couple of hours. It seemed to be too nice a day for her not to get up and do something, however.

Just before 4pm, Elsa stood up and flapped her giant wings. I wondered if she was going to fly. She didn't though; she was just stretching a little. Before getting down again, she stretched her pouch by doing a pouch inversion—as I showed in one of my photos in my previous post. Then she collapsed her legs and got down again. Two minutes later, a gull came right by her head with its bill open. She's been buzzed before by gulls—they don't seem to bother her. About 10 minutes later, she decided that it was time to get up and go fishing. She walked to the edge of the island, and flew down to the water. Then she swam around the island and headed up the channel toward the pipeline—where there is particularly good fishing due to a stream from the Highwood River.

Elsa only fished for about 5-10 minutes—she didn't have to fish any longer, because she was getting fish with almost every scoop (see my previous post for some fish scooping shots). When she had eaten her fill, she swam past the north island and eventually settled down on the south tip of the south island.

The initial photo I've attached shows Elsa hunkered down after her wing flapping and pouch stretching exercises--before she went fishing. In the photo, I'm showing the gull that flew quite close to her. I'll put two wing flapping photos in comments. And I'll put a fourth shot of Elsa flying down to the water from the island—where she began her brief swim up the channel to her “fishing hole.”



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa doing some wing flapping.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa doing some more wing flapping exercising.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa flying down to the water to begin swimming up the channel to do some fishing.



Comment

Here's another photo from Mar, 18. A California Gull is showing that they can catch fish too--there seem to be lots of fish to go around 😊.



March 22, 2022

😊☀️Elsa Report☀️😊

It was a lovely day at Frank Lake yesterday. The temperature was 9 degrees, and it was sunny—and it was forecast to be sunny all afternoon. Because it was so warm, the honey bees were out of their nearby hives. They come out, presumably looking for nectar somewhere. That's why I like to park near the gate. It didn't matter yesterday; there were honey bees zipping around as I got out of my car. I know that they are not inclined to sting me, but I just hoped that I wouldn't inadvertently shut some of them in my car.

As I walked across the field, I could see Elsa on the south island. She looked like she had settled in for the afternoon. I imagine that she had been fishing earlier, and she had probably exercised a bit, so there was no reason to do anything but rest—and play the waiting game that she had been playing all winter: waiting for the cold to go away and for the other pelicans to return.

Just as on Mar. 18, when Elsa was on the north island, there was a California Gull near her on the south island. Perhaps the gull was enjoying being close to such a large non-threatening bird. Maybe it was thinking that nothing is going to attack me if I'm in this pelican's company. Or, maybe the gull just wanted her spot on the island 😊.

For the first time this year, I saw swans at Frank Lake. About 20 Tundra Swans flew right over my head as I was standing on the shore across from Elsa. Instead of the low-pitched trumpeting of Trumpeter Swans, they were making a kind of high pitched squeak-honking cry. I confirmed in my photos later that some of them had distinctive yellow marks on their bills near their eyes. About half of them settled on the water across from the island.

It was entertaining to watch a California Gull pecking pieces from a very large fish and then trying to get it into position for possibly swallowing it. The gull tried mightily, but it was not successful. Eventually, the gull left the remains—presumably, to try to find a smaller fish.

There was an amazing number of Northern Pintail ducks flying. They seemed to be reluctant to land because a Bald Eagle was circling. Occasionally, when the eagle was getting too close, one or more of the gulls gave chase. There were two Common Ravens flying also—making their deep-throated crow-like cries. And, of course, Canada Geese were everywhere, honking, fighting, and spreading out into possible future nesting locations.

I've attached a photo of Elsa all hunkered down with her feet, bill, and pouch all tucked into her feathers—notice the tip of her bill protruding from her wing. A California Gull is standing by. In comments, I'll show some of the Tundra Swans that flew in.



Comment

Here's a photo of some of the Tundra Swans that came to Frank Lake yesterday.



Comment

And here are some more of the Tundra Swans.



Comment

This is what the south island looked like yesterday. Elsa was at the extreme left tip of the island.



Comment

Here's a photo of one of the swans that I managed to catch up with as they flew overhead.



March 22, 2022

When I visit Elsa, the overwintering American White Pelican, at Frank Lake, I report my observations, and I present some photos. Quite often I see things that I don't write about—usually, because I will already have written quite a bit 😊.

On March 18, on an Elsa visit, I saw two California Gulls trying to establish rights to a piece of fish. It was a very small piece of fish—seemingly, not worth fighting for. But each determined gull had their bill firmly locked on the piece of fish. I took a few photos. I didn't see which gull was able to eventually possess the piece of fish. What I did see after the competition, however, was quite astonishing.

The fish was gone. But the gulls evidently decided that they would each acknowledge the other in a dance. It was almost as though they were saying to each other “I love it when we have a food fight.” I've attached a photo of what appears to be a dance—although, I might well have caught movements that just looked like dancing. In any case, I thought that the photo was intriguing.

In comments, I'll post a photo that I took just before the dancing. It shows the two combatants, which are presumably mates, as they each try to wrest the piece of fish from the other.



Comment

Here's a photo of the two California Gulls fighting over a small piece of fish.



March 24, 2022

😊👋 Elsa Report 👋😊

We had a Chinook yesterday, so I expected that the temperature would be quite mild at Frank Lake when I went there. In fact, when I arrived it was 12 degrees. By the time I left, the temperature had climbed to 16 degrees—with a considerable wind.

I could see Elsa, in her resting position, on the north island, as I walked across the field from the road. When I arrived down at the shore opposite Elsa, there were two other Alberta Birds members just down from me: Karen and Judy. We took a few pictures and chatted a while.

While Elsa rested, I looked around at her avian company. I hadn't noticed Northern Shoveler ducks before, but there were many of them here now. In addition to the California Gulls, the Ring-billed Gulls had arrived—they're smaller and have only black tips on their bills. I've noted Northern Pintails before, and they were here in much greater numbers. And, of course, Canada Geese continued to be present. There were three Common Ravens touring the lake, as well as one Bald Eagle. Many swans, both Tundra and Trumpeter (identified by their low, distinctive honking) flew over Frank Lake—but always quite far away.

Elsa got up and flapped her wings on three occasions. On the third time, she flew to the water west of the north island. She swam for a while, and it looked like she was going to go by the island and go fishing. But, instead, she went for another flight over the south island and back to the water where she had been before. It appeared that she wanted to satisfy herself that it was safe to swim to the pipeline; then that's where she went.

Initially, Elsa tried to fish by the pipeline outflow around the boulders. She didn't stay there long, however. I think that she has a difficult time scooping near the rocks. So, she swam down the channel a bit where the water is a little deeper, and she can use her pouch more effectively. It wasn't long before she had obtained a dinner-size fish.

The photo that I've attached to this post shows Elsa swimming downstream from the pipeline, where she resumed fishing. I'll put a few more photos in the comments.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa making a flight toward the south island. She turned around after that and came down to the water just off the north island--and swam to the pipeline to begin fishing.



Comment

When Elsa had arrived at water where she could properly use her pouch, it wasn't very long before she hauled in a sizable catch--as shown in this photo.



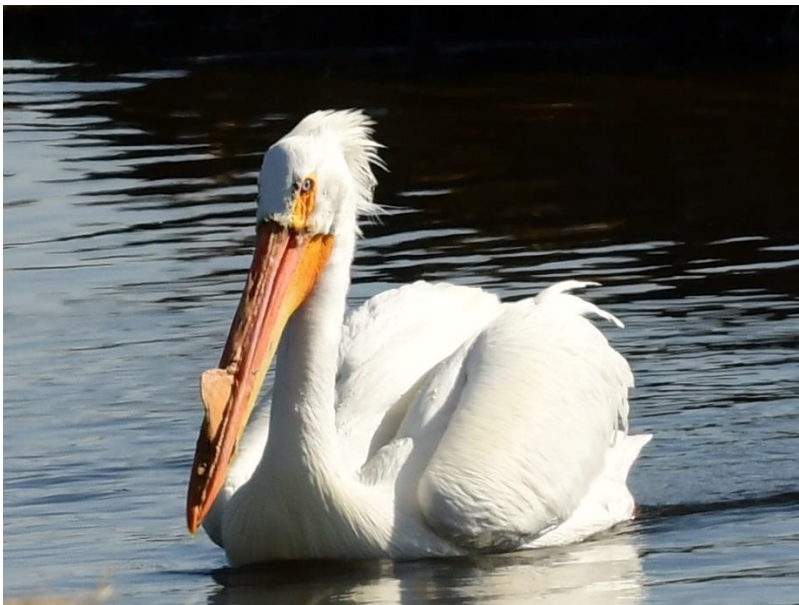
Comment

After Elsa had finished fishing, she dried her wings before settling back down on the north island.



Comment

American white pelicans of both sexes develop a fibrous growth on their upper bill to indicate sexual maturity. This is called a mating bump, as well as a nuptial tubercle and other names. Essentially, the growth lets other pelicans know about a pelican's mating readiness. Some time after the breeding season, the bump falls off. Pelicans under three years of age do not grow the mating bump. I've attached a photo of a pelican with a mating bump. I took it last April at Frank Lake.



March 27, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

I was at Frank Lake around 2:15pm yesterday. The temperature was 4 degrees and there was a light wind. According to my weather app, the temperature was supposed to go up to 9, and it was to continue to be mostly cloudy.

I found Elsa resting on the north island. She got up several times in the next two hours; she did some stretching, but then she hunkered down again. Almost all of the time I watched her, there was at least one California Gull beside her. The gulls seem to be fascinated by the big white bird. In addition to stretching her wings, Elsa did some pouch stretching, which made me think that she might do some fishing later.

Elsa flew from the top of the island at about 4:15. She landed in the water and had to take several steps to get into the air again. But, when she was up the second time, she was able to fly well. She flew low to the water to the east of the south island, and she joined a group of gulls that were in the water. Then she went for a leisurely swim toward the north island, and continued up the channel to just below the pipeline.

I didn't see Elsa catch any fish. In fact, she didn't seem to try very hard. Maybe she decided that she wasn't very hungry after all. Then she swam back all of the way to the south island. I left her at that point. It looked like she was going to dry herself off, and then go into her resting position on the top of the south island.

The initial photo that I'll attach to this post shows Elsa flying to join a group of gulls that were in the water. I'll place a few more photos in the comments. I should mention that for the first time this year, I saw a Northern Harrier circling over the lake. They like small birds and rodents, so Elsa was not in any danger. I also saw many Tundra Swans on the ice and in the water way south of the south island.



Comment

Elsa is doing some pouch stretching in this photo.



Comment

This photo shows a California Gull with Elsa. There was almost always one by her side on the island.



Comment

In this photo, I show Elsa pushing off from the water as she tried to get into the air.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa swimming toward the pipeline outflow to do some fishing.



Comment

In this photo, Elsa was just down from the pipeline.



March 30, 2022

😊☀️ Elsa Report ☀️😊

It was a lovely sunny day at Frank Lake yesterday (March 29). My weather app said that there was to be sun right through to sunset. The temperature when I arrived at the Frank Lake gate was 7 degrees. And the wind was 8 km/hr. I wore a medium-weight jacket over my usual heavy shirt, camera carrier harness and utility vest.

There wasn't any snow or mud on the gravel access road. I wouldn't be surprised if Ducks Unlimited were to unlock the gate in a few days. As I walked in, I could see swans, probably Tundra, on the eastern part of the lake. There were some Canada Geese too. The ice has been melting a lot, and there's ample water for them to swim in the east now.

As I crossed the field, the familiar symphony of gulls and geese became louder. Frank Lake is definitely getting busy. As usual, in early spring, gulls and geese seem to be the dominant species. There were several varieties of ducks also; the number of Northern Shovelers has increased dramatically in the last few days. As before, there were many Tundra Swans gathered south of the south island.

I spotted Elsa lying down on the north island. She seems to prefer that island over the south island during the day. I'm guessing that, while she probably enjoys having so much company, it's kind of nice resting in a not so busy area—the south island is starting to be very crowded with the gulls preparing to nest. Some geese like to nest there too. Also, the north island is closer to the channel just down from the pipeline, where Elsa likes to fish.

The photo I've attached shows Elsa swimming in the foaming water near the pipeline. She tried her luck at fishing there as well as farther down the channel. I'll put a few other photos in comments.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa leaving the north island to go fishing this afternoon.



Comment

When Elsa had finished fishing, she swam to the south island to rest for the evening. The photo I've attached shows her trying to get a pair of gulls to move over, because she likes to be right at the tip of the island.



Comment

The gulls moved, and Elsa was able to access her favourite evening spot.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa swimming to the south island after fishing.



April 1, 2022

😊🔓Elsa Report🔓😊

I used the unlocked emoji above, because the gate at Frank Lake was unlocked today! After 40 visits to see Elsa, when I had to walk in, what a pleasure it was to just drive through the open gate to the pullout parking area, across the field from the pipeline, and park! Mind you, I'm not complaining too much, because I got regular exercise through the winter!

With the great weather and open gate, Frank Lake was a very popular place today. I encountered a number of Frank Lake regulars and friends: [Joe Harley](#), [Don Whittaker](#), [Lloyd Baird](#), and [Doug Newman](#)--many thanks for giving me a copy of your new book, "Birding-Alberta, Volume 2", Doug! In addition, there were many other visitors.

Elsa was resting on the south tip of the south island. Recently, that has meant that she's going to stay at that location for the night. I watched her from the shore for a while. She did stand up twice, but she went right back down again. I took photos on both occasions and I'll share them in this post. As has been the case for some time, at least one California Gull was always by her side.

There were some additional duck species. But mostly the birds were the same as on my previous visit. The gulls and geese are getting more serious about nesting. No other pelican has yet arrived. It's possible that we could see one very soon!

I've attached a photo of Elsa standing up to have a look around. I'll put a few more photos in comments.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa doing her leg stretch.



Comment

Here's another photo of Elsa just before she hunkered down again.



Comment

Keep your head down, Elsa!



Comment

Don't wake the gulls, Elsa!



Comment

Canada Geese are looking for possible nesting locations at Frank Lake. In the photo I've attached, it looks like a pair of geese are thinking about using a small island near the pipeline channel.



Comment

Do you remember my photo of the gulls apparently dancing? Here's another one I took today at Frank Lake.



April 4, 2022

As I drove from the High River exit yesterday, on my way to see Elsa, the overwintering pelican, at Frank Lake, I encountered hundreds of swans on both sides of Hwy. 23. There were probably about 200 swans in a slough on my right, and the same number, if not more, in the fields on my left. I drove on a road through a field toward the slough. From the sounds that the swans made, they seemed to be mainly Trumpeter Swans. But I saw some Tundra Swans as well.

There were many pairs of swans. I always enjoy seeing courtship displays. I managed to get a photo of a pair of Trumpeters telling each other how much they care 📸❤️.



Comment

Here's a photo of a pair of Trumpeter Swans flying away from the slough.



Comment

I thought this photo is interesting. The three swans on the left are trumpeters, while the one on the right is a tundra.



April 4, 2022

😊👋 Elsa Report 👋😊

I drove to Frank Lake yesterday. The wind was quite brisk at times when I stood on the shore opposite Elsa. Even though the temperature was about 7 degrees, the 24 km/hr wind made it seem like winter again. I lowered the ear flaps on my hat and put my gloves on.

For those who may not have seen my post on April 1, the gate at Frank Lake is now unlocked—and it will remain unlocked until hunting season starts in the first week of September. I drove to the pullout parking by the field across from the pipeline. In the distance, I saw that Elsa was in her resting position on the south tip of the south island. I've noticed that when she is there, she is usually finished being active for the day. As before, when Elsa was resting, a California Gull was by her side. I really wonder if it's always the same gull, and it's just trying to be friendly.

Elsa looked fine today. She continues to have bare patches on the back of her neck, and they'll likely stay there until she is able to be more active after the other pelicans arrive—which should be very soon 😊.

I noticed a Canada Goose walk over to Elsa. I wondered if Elsa was going to get up and tell the goose to back off—as I've seen her do, when a goose seemed to want her resting spot. But, no, the goose just wanted to honk and stick its tongue out at some bird near Elsa (probably another goose). Elsa was probably a bit annoyed with the close encounter, but she didn't get up right away. However, it wasn't too much after that incident that Elsa decided to stand up, stretch, and look around. She was up for a few minutes. That was the only time I was able to get a “non-hunkered-down” photo of Elsa today. She extended her impressive wings, and she cleaned herself up a bit.

I've attached a photo of the time that Elsa stood up and stretched out her wings. In comments, I'll put a photo of Elsa and the goose that came over and stuck its tongue out at something.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa and the annoyed goose.



Comment

Here's another photo of Elsa and her gull friend.



April 6, 2022

😊🐟🐟🐟 Elsa Report 🐟🐟🐟😊

Emojis: Everything's OK; The wind was fierce; Fishing was good; Still waiting for a pelican.

I saw swans again yesterday, on my way to Frank Lake to see Elsa, the overwintering pelican, down Hwy. 23, east of High River. I won't take time to post any swans right now, however, because there was too much going on at Frank Lake.

It was mostly cloudy at Frank Lake, but occasionally the sun would peek through. The wind was blowing a lot—the highest reading I got on my iPhone app for High River was 35 km/hr—but I'll bet it was higher at Frank Lake, and it was quite gusty. The temperature was 10 degrees, but I had donned my parka and my cap with ear flaps—and I was glad to have them!

As I walked from the pipeline, toward the shore, across from the islands, I could see Elsa in the water with Northern Shovelers, gulls, and Canada Geese. I saw many birds flying, even though the wind was strong. I had gone to Frank Lake late in the afternoon, because the wind was forecast to be less severe then. Elsa decided to fly toward the pipeline. She looked like she was flying well across the wind direction. She went down to the pipeline area.

There were many gulls, both California and Ring-billed, trying to get fish near the pipeline—where fish enter the lake from a Highwood River stream. The gulls would either hover (aided significantly by the wind) and dive, or perch on the rocks and stab. I saw several fish flip out of the water near the gulls. It looked like the gulls were getting a few—even though it took them a while. Elsa tried some scooping with her pouch some way down the channel from the pipeline. She didn't catch anything. Then she swam toward the pipeline, just off to one side, where the water is less turbulent. A couple of scoops later and she had a sizable snack. That must be a bit frustrating for the gulls when she can just swim up and immediately and successfully scoop—while they have to wait until just the right time—and then a fish they snatch might be too large to swallow—Elsa doesn't care!

My first photo shows Elsa flying toward the pipeline area. She flew from the water and had to take a few water steps to takeoff, as large birds typically need to do. I'll post another photo in a comment showing the last step that Elsa had to make before she was airborne. And I'll put a few other photos in comments.

It should not be too long before Elsa is joined by other pelicans 😊.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa just getting airborne after taking her last water step.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa swimming toward the pipeline area.



Comment

Elsa was almost immediately successful after she arrived at her favourite place by the pipeline outflow.



Comment

And a few seconds later, Elsa had drained the water from her pouch, and the fish went down the hatch.



Comment

Here's a photo of a California Gull that managed to get a fish.



April 8, 2022

😊🌞🕒 Elsa Report 🕒🌞😊

It was an enjoyable afternoon yesterday at Frank Lake. The temperature was 18 degrees and the sun was often avoiding being behind the clouds. There was a little wind, but nothing that tried to sweep me off my feet—just a pleasant breeze. No additional pelicans had yet arrived.

More visitors than usual were out. Sometimes whole families were enjoying the outing. [Nicole Kaufmann](#) came by, and we chatted a bit. I noticed that she was using the same camera model that I used to use. We took many shots of gulls, geese, ducks, and a hunkered down Elsa—although, Elsa did stand up a couple of times.

I figured that Elsa would ultimately get up and be active, since she was on the north island; she doesn't usually spend the night there. Unfortunately, Nicole had left by the time that Elsa started to be active—Elsa flew and swam—and she even fished; but I didn't see her scoop up anything. At one point, after several unsuccessful scoops, Elsa slapped the water very forcefully about five times with her wings. She didn't seem to be taking a bath, because she wasn't dipping under when she flapped. It seemed that she was trying to stir up the fish.

I've noted in a few posts that there are often one or more gulls, usually California Gulls, near Elsa. I was reading and thinking about that. Gulls and pelicans both like fish, and they share the same habitat. Gulls only do shallow diving, and they don't cause fish to swim to the water's surface, like cormorants. But gulls seem to appreciate Elsa's knack for finding fish. And, I think that Elsa thinks that gulls are great company. Both species seem to like sharing the other's space.

I've attached a photo I took yesterday afternoon with Elsa and three gulls. She had just slapped the water near their location, perhaps trying to get some fish to move to the surface. She flapped also as she stepped onto the shore with the three gulls. When I looked at my photo, I thought of Elsa greeting her little buddies.

I'll put three more photos from yesterday in comments: 1) Elsa slapping the water, 2) Elsa just lifting off for a brief flight, and 3) a photo of the first cormorant that I've seen at Frank Lake this year.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa slapping the water, seemingly hoping to stir up the fish.



Comment

Elsa took two short flights. I took this photo just as Elsa was lifting off from the island on one of her flights.



Comment

A Double-crested Cormorant flew toward the south island. This is the first one that I've seen this year.



April 9, 2022

😬 Elsa Report 😬

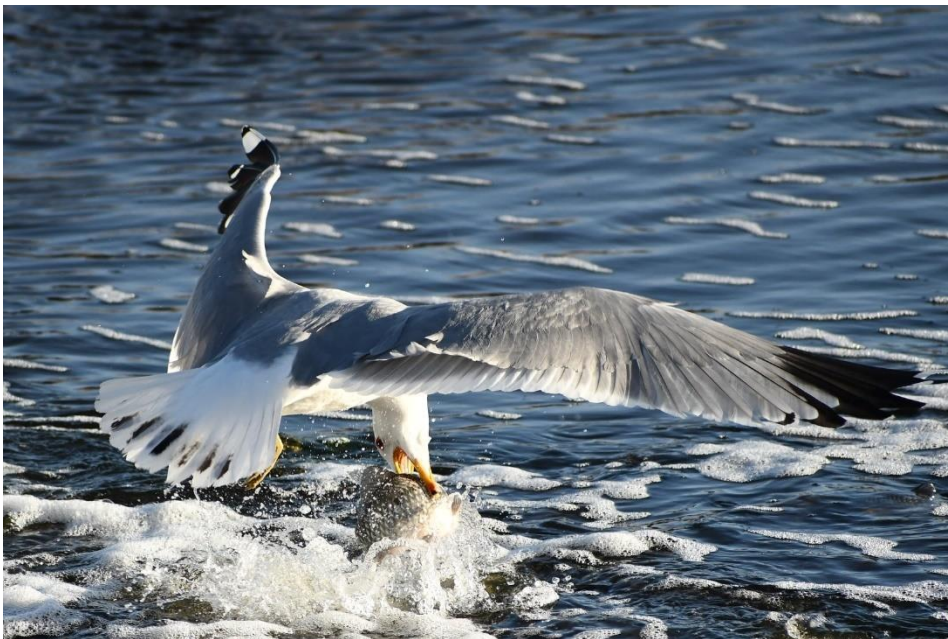
This is a second-hand report, but I wanted everyone to know what I know about Elsa before I go to bed.

Jill ([Isaac Vale](#)) reported yesterday (Friday) afternoon, in a comment on my last Elsa Report, that she had seen a new pelican with Elsa at Frank Lake! I went to Frank Lake as soon as I could after I read her comment. I was there about 6:15pm. The wind was extremely blustery. I looked carefully from the shore, down from the pipeline, all over the islands, and the surrounding water and land, but I didn't see either Elsa or her friend. Just after midnight this morning, I received a message from [Greg Wagner](#). He said that someone had reported seeing four pelicans at Frank Lake—but he didn't say who reported them or exactly where the pelicans were.

I noticed at 1:15am this morning that [Bev Rogan](#) had made a post with a photo of two pelicans (presumably Elsa and a friend) at Frank Lake, on the top of the south island I think. See her post for a photo of the two of them hunkered down.

I'm hopeful that I'll be able to bring you a first-hand report of Elsa and a friend later today 😊.

I should post a photo I guess, since I always do. No photo of Elsa or the newcomer though, unfortunately. The California Gulls were very active in the extremely high wind yesterday evening. Generally, there were about 15-20 of them, hovering over the outflow and perched on the rocks, trying to get fish. I assumed that the wind was churning up the water so that the fish were visible—or maybe they just liked the wind-assisted hovering 😊. I've attached a photo of a California Gull that snagged a large fish.



Comment

The fish was way too big to swallow—the gull dropped it soon after I took this photo.



April 9, 2022

😊 Elsa Report 😊

I was disappointed when I went to Frank Lake yesterday. I could not find either Elsa or the new pelican anywhere. I thought that, with the wind being so severe, perhaps they had just gone somewhere to be out of the wind. Maybe I should have checked the observation blind 😊. Anyway, I had high hopes that I would find them at Frank Lake today.

We were having strange weather today. I tried to gauge when might be a good time to go to Frank Lake, by looking at my iPhone weather app. It looked like around 2pm might not be too bad. I parked at the pullout parking that's across the field from the pipeline at 2:15pm. There were several vehicles there already. It was cloudy, but it wasn't raining. Although, the clouds were beginning to look like it could rain at any time.

As I walked past the pipeline, I saw many gulls fishing. So, maybe yesterday it wasn't just the wind that had caused the gulls to be so frantic. In fact, I learned later from [Jack Sluys](#) that when he looked just down from the pipeline, he could see many fish flopping around. He said that it looked like they might be trying to get back to the pipeline—so there were pools of flopping fish. It has always been evident that the gulls and Elsa have been attracted to the pipeline—but, from Jack's description, this situation seemed to be quite extraordinary today.

I found Elsa on the south island near the southern tip. She was all by herself, except for her gull friends, in her huddled, resting position. I went down to the shore opposite Elsa, and I took a few photos; I was resigned to play the waiting game—that I often play when I visit Elsa. That's frequently a good opportunity to look around at what else is going on. A Killdeer flew along the shore. Then an American Avocet flew by the island to the water south of the island. I saw two American Coots in the water also. The Canada Geese were honking and the California and Ring-billed Gulls were screeching. There were many ducks that I didn't try to identify or count between and around the islands—and in the air. I saw swans flying east, and I saw Snow Geese flying west. It's a busy place now.

As I mentioned, [Jack Sluys](#) came by to chat and take photos. [Joe Bailey](#), [Donna Glawson](#) and [John Glawson](#) came by too. Occasionally, Elsa stood up and stretched and preened. I wondered if the new pelican was still around. Suddenly, Donna saw the new pelican fly in from somewhere—probably from the lake basin in the east. There he was (and I don't know if he's a male or not—just as I don't know Elsa's gender either). He looked about the same size as Elsa when he was swimming. He swam over to the tip of the island, and he used his wings to help him to attain the top—just as Elsa does. Elsa watched him. The new pelican was displaying a mating bump on his upper bill. Elsa still has none. I know that some people believe that only the males have mating bumps (aka nuptial tubercles). But actually both genders grow them. And that's how one pelican can determine whether another pelican is available and interested in mating. So, I wondered whether the newcomer would just go away, since he's evidently ready and available, and Elsa is showing that she's in neither of those states.

Whatever is the case, the two pelicans could still be friends. I took a few photos of the new pelican, with his wings open, being observed by Elsa on top of the island. One of the

gulls is in the photo also. If a gull could look wistful, I think the gull was doing that. I think that if Elsa were to go away that the gull (or gulls) might miss having her around.

I've attached a photo showing the newcomer, Elsa, and a gull buddy.



Comment

Here's another photo of the new pelican, Elsa, and a gull.



Comment

I like the way that this photo shows off the newcomer's hairstyle.



Comment

I saw my first avocet of the year at Frank Lake yesterday. Here's a photo as the avocet flew past.



April 10, 2022

😊 Elsa Windows and iDevice Wallpaper for April 😊

As I've done in the previous three months, I've prepared wallpaper files of Elsa using different aspect ratios. I've placed the high res versions in my Dropbox folder as before. The files can be found at the following Dropbox link:

[Alberta_Birds_Wallpaper](#)

I've provided cropped images from four of my photos this month. All of them include the first pelican that arrived at Frank Lake to join Elsa, as well as Elsa. I took all of the photos at Frank Lake on Apr. 9. In addition to the two American White Pelicans, there are California Gulls.

There are aspect ratio versions in the Alberta_Birds_Wallpaper Dropbox link for: iPad(Portrait)--Elsa_Apr_iPadP, iPad(Landscape)--Elsa_Apr_iPadL, iPhone(Portrait Only)--Elsa_Apr_iPhone, PC(Landscape Only)--Elsa_Apr_PC, and Zoom(Landscape Only)--Elsa_Apr_Zoom.

April is the last month that I will make these files, since I will stop posting Elsa Reports after April—because there should be many pelicans by May; and we will have seen Elsa successfully through her second winter at Frank Lake!

I've attached the PC (16:9) version of the April wallpaper image (Elsa_Apr_PC). But, you'll need to go to the above Dropbox link in order to download the high quality file. I'll put the remaining four wallpaper images in comments (but again you'll need to go to the Dropbox link above in order to download the high quality files).



Comment

This iPad Landscape wallpaper photo has the file name: Elsa_Apr_iPadL.JPG .



Comment

This iPad Portrait wallpaper photo has the file name: Elsa_Apr_iPadP.JPG .



Comment

This iPhone wallpaper photo has the file name: Elsa_Apr_iPhone.JPG .



Comment

This Zoom wallpaper photo has the file name: Elsa_Apr_Zoom.JPG .



April 12, 2022

🙄👉 Elsa Report 👈🙄

It was very windy when I went to Frank Lake yesterday afternoon. At 5pm, the temperature in High River was 0, and the wind was 31 km/hr from the north. I felt the need to don my parka and my balaclava—I was still windblown, but toasty warm 😊.

I only saw one pelican: Elsa. She was resting on the top of the south island—her usual done-for-the-day location. Occasionally, one or two gulls came over to her to check up on how she was doing—all snuggled in as she was. She poked her head up a few times, but otherwise she remained crouched down all of the time I was there. I thought that maybe the new pelican might fly in like he did when I was there two days ago—when I first saw him. But Elsa remained the only pelican all of the time I was observing. I wonder if the newcomer left Frank Lake. Maybe he decided that, since Elsa doesn't have a mating bump on her bill, maybe he should continue his journey to the pelican colony to find a mate. Or, maybe he just went somewhere temporarily, to try to get some shelter from the wind. Hopefully, we'll find out if he's still around in the next couple of days.

I noticed that there were many changes in the birds there. Instead of only two American Coots, as there were on my previous visit, there are now 18. I saw three American Avocets instead of just one as there was before. The south island is now almost covered with gulls. And the north island is about half covered. There will likely be gull chicks on the islands by mid-May. Almost all of the Canada Geese seem to be resigned to do their nesting off the islands. They were up and down the shore, seemingly trying to find suitable nesting locations there—so visitors, be careful as you walk around the area! I gave up trying to determine the number and variety of duck species, but the main species continues to be Northern Shoveler—and there must have been at least 100 of them in the water near the islands.

I've attached a photo of Elsa with her head up. I'll put another photo of a snuggled Elsa, with two gulls by her side, in the comments. Also in the comments, I'll put some photos of avocets—they're such elegant birds!



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa, with two gulls seemingly checking up on how she was doing.



Comment

Here's a photo of one of the avocets.



Comment

Here's the above avocet with one of the two others that I saw.



Comment

I got a brief glimpse of a Killdeer.



Comment

You're welcome! Gulls make nests from grass, weeds, and sticks on the ground. I've attached a photo of three California Gull chicks and their parents. I took the photo on June 21/21 at Frank Lake.



April 14, 2022

🙄👉👈🧊 Elsa Report 🧊👉👈🙄

I knew that it was going to be cold yesterday at Frank Lake, but I wanted to check on how Elsa was doing. The temperature was -8, and the wind was 24 km/hr (making a wind chill of -16) when I parked at the pullout parking across the field from the pipeline. It was definitely parka, scarf, and balaclava time!

I was at Frank Lake earlier than usual yesterday. Therefore, I expected that I might see birds that might not be there later. As I walked toward the shore across from the south island, I saw a large group of Black-necked Stilts foraging in the shallow water. I think that there were around 30 of them. They were the first stilts that I had seen this year at Frank Lake. Farther along the stream from the pipeline, I saw about the same number of American Avocets. American Coots were there in huge numbers. I think that there were around 150 of them—mostly, they were much farther down the stream from the avocets. Northern Shovelers still appear to be the predominant duck in the channel--there were probably about 50 of them. Gulls and Canada Geese were in various locations and probably numbered 100 or more each. Snow Geese flew near the lake from various directions, and I saw many that were west of the lake; probably there were at least 300 of them at different times.

On the south island, I saw dark shapes at the south end. They were Double-crested Cormorants. They flew to and away from the island frequently. At one point, I counted 18 of them standing on the island. North of the cormorants were several groups of American White Pelicans. Some of them flew away and returned from time to time. I saw 11 of them at one time on the island—one of the pelicans was Elsa—but I could only guess which one was her, because several of them kept their bills tucked into their wings. There was one pelican with a mark on the back of her neck—similar to the mark that I've seen on Elsa's neck. There was another pelican right beside her. All of the pelicans that I saw, which were out of their untucked positions, had mating bumps on their bills.

If indeed the pelican that I identified as Elsa really was her, then she seemed to have been accepted in the group. But she just wasn't active today. There have been reports of 8-11 pelicans at Frank Lake over the past 3-4 days. I wonder if it's the same group of pelicans. They seem to be satisfied with hanging around Frank Lake for a while before carrying on to their mating colony. Maybe, since the fishing is good at Frank Lake, and the weather is not so good, they would just as soon be there as in any other place until spring really happens.

The photo that I've attached to this post does not show Elsa, but I think that it's one of the cuter shots that I took yesterday—a pelican landed back on the island and may have taken the pelican already on the island by surprise. I'll put a few other photos of pelicans in the comments.



Comment

I believe that the pelican in the middle of this threesome is Elsa. She kept in her snuggle all of the time I was watching them.



Comment

I believe that these two are a pair. This seemed to be a pelican kiss.



Comment

This pelican was doing a pouch exercise.



Comment

This pelican swam right through some foraging Black-necked Stilts.



Comment

One of the pelicans decided to join one of the others. My imagination is probably just running wild, but his friend seemed to be delighted.



Comment

These three were doing some fishing together.



Comment

This pelican seemed to be trying to decide on the next agenda item.



April 16, 2022

🐰🐰 Elsa Report 🐰🐰

🐰 Just because it's Easter—Happy Easter, Elsa fans!

I went to Frank Lake on Good Friday. My weather app said that it was -3 in High River and that I should expect mostly cloudy conditions. The wind was said to be from the east at 8 km/hr. There was hardly any wind, and I found sunshine, a pleasant blue sky, and fluffy white clouds--maybe that forecast was in need of updating 😊.

There was quite a sizable party of 12 people (including a few kids) at the pipeline area. They looked like they were intending to catch some carp. There seem to be so many carp in Frank Lake that I don't believe they were going to make much of a dent in the population. Why they would think that it's a good idea to take fish from all that treated effluent is beyond me. It's been shown that neither the fish nor the effluent harms the birds, but I think that people might be more choosy where they fish. Maybe they didn't intend to consume them, but it still seemed weird.

I didn't notice as many pelicans on the top of the south island as I saw last time. I wondered if most of them had decided to leave. I needn't have wondered. Suddenly, out of the east, a squadron of pelicans appeared, gliding toward the island. What a majestic sight! They made one pass over the island, and then six of them prepared to land, as if they were VTOL (vertical take-off and landing) aircraft settling down on an aircraft carrier. The ones that didn't prepare to land initially, circled and then landed as well. Their landings caused the gulls on the island to have a certain amount of heads-up concern. I counted the pelicans on the island, and I found that there were 13—one of which, hopefully, was Elsa.

I imagine that the incoming pelicans had formed a fishing party on the east side of the lake. That was their favourite fishing location last year, when Frank Lake hosted 700 pelicans, and their 500 cormorant fishing buddies. If they didn't deplete the carp population significantly, then I don't think that the 12 fishing people I saw earlier are going to provide much competition.

I wanted to find Elsa among the pelicans. I looked carefully through the viewfinder of my 500mm lens-equipped camera. Every pelican I inspected had a mating bump (or nuptial tubercle). I have never seen Elsa with one. Maybe she's still too young? I don't know. But, for now, it has been a useful identifying feature. I did notice that there were three pelicans hunkered down together—with their bills tucked into their wings. I took many photos of the pelicans as I watched, hoping to see something later.

When I got home and examined my photos, it was quite clear that one of the formerly hunkered down pelicans had been in fact Elsa—and I had many shots of her. I've attached a photo that shows Elsa flapping her wings in front of some gulls. Maybe that's all I need to do in the future in order to pick out Elsa: look for a pelican that has many gulls nearby. It was as though the gulls had enjoyed Elsa's company since they had arrived at Frank Lake, and they still like to be close to the friendly big white bird.

I'll put a few other photos in the comments also.



Comment

Six members of the pelican fishing party preparing to land on the island.



Comment

Here's one of the members of the pelican fishing party landing on the island.



Comment

This photo shows Elsa just noticing that the fishing party was landing on the island.



Comment

Elsa walked out to the line of pelicans and flapped her wings. I took this shot around the same time as the one I posted originally.



Comment

Here are all of the 13 pelicans on the island. Elsa is the fourth one from the right.



April 19, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

The main purpose of my trip to Frank Lake yesterday was to meet with [Renee Carrier](#) and [Leslie Bogula LaVigne](#). They wanted to present a picture of Elsa to me—to express their appreciation for my Elsa Reports over the winter. When I saw the painting that Renee had created, I struggled for words. I had given her two of my photos, and Renee had used one of them as a reference. Her painting shows Elsa readying her magnificent wings for a flight. I was overwhelmed that they would wish to give me such a wonderful gift. Thank you very much, Renee and Leslie! [Carolyn Harley](#) and [Joe Harley](#) came by as we were meeting. Carolyn took some photos and videos of the three of us. She has posted them in Alberta Birds. Thank you, Carolyn!

Renee, Leslie, and I went to the pipeline area after that. We enjoyed seeing and photographing the pelicans and the many other species of birds that have come to Frank Lake. Yesterday, the area was very popular with visitors. Some people had to park in front of the observation blind and walk back, since the pullout parking across from the pipeline was packed. It was uplifting to see so many people out experiencing the birds at Frank Lake.

Mostly, I watched the pelicans. I love their antics. And I always try to pick out Elsa among all of the other pelicans. In addition, I try to count how many pelicans there were. With so many of them swimming, flying, resting, and preening, it was difficult to settle on a number. I eventually decided to estimate that there were about 40 pelicans. That's about three times the number of pelicans that I saw on my previous visit!

Many of the pelicans were on the south island. The ones that were resting usually had their bills tucked into their feathers—in the manner that I've often seen Elsa do. When they are like that, it's not possible to tell if one of those large white bodies is Elsa or not, because I can't see whether there's a mating bump on their upper bills. And, even the ones that revealed their bills, moved around so much that it was difficult to identify Elsa. My strategy for finding her was to take as many photos as possible, in all of the different pelican areas, and then look carefully at my photos at home.

I was successful today. I found several photos that include Elsa that I'll share. They will all be in the comments on this day though, because my main attached photo has to be of my treasured painting of Elsa from Renee and Leslie.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa, mating bump or not, seemingly trying to catch the eye of the big guy near her—I think that he's already taken though, Elsa!



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa on the extreme left, with some friends, watching one of the pelicans coming back to the island.



Comment

Here's a photo of Elsa and a gull buddy with some other pelicans on the south island.



Comment

This photo doesn't show Elsa. These two pelicans, evidently a pair, were part of a fishing gang. They decided to pause for a bit.



Comment

I caught this pelican taking a bath after fishing.



April 22, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

I went to Frank Lake on Wednesday to see Elsa—and the many other pelicans and species of birds that have arrived there. The weather cooperated well: it was 4 degrees, sunny with some clouds, and the wind was 13 km/hr from the northeast.

There were a few pelicans on the south island. And there were a few flying in different directions. I saw a gang of about 20 pelicans fishing south of the south island. I assumed that the rest of the pelicans were off fishing somewhere else. I tried to find Elsa through my camera lenses, but I failed. As usual, though, I took many photos of pelicans, hoping to find her later. I try to remember to bring my binoculars, but I always forget. Maybe an “Elsa spotter” will join me sometime 😊.

There were many visitors on Wednesday. One person I spoke with said that he had seen many pelicans on the east side of the lake. This year, I’ve only visited the west side, which is where the pipeline is. It makes sense that the pelicans would want to go to the east side, because there is little ice now (even with our spring/winter conditions). And that’s where the pelicans last year preferred to fish. So, after taking a goodly number of photos, I drove over to the observation blind parking area.

I saw a long line of white birds at the eastern edge of the lake. I thought that they might be pelicans initially. However, after I scanned them with my camera lens, it looked like they were actually Snow Geese. Earlier I had seen two huge flocks (about 200 or more each) of Snow Geese flying, but I lost track of where they ended up. I went into the observation blind.

Mostly I saw American Coots, and ducks, in the water off the blind. I took a few photos and hoped that something exciting would happen. Two visitors that I had seen earlier came by. They must have brought good luck, because pelicans suddenly appeared around the marsh grass to the east of the blind. And there were many—maybe 50 or so. They were doing gang fishing. And they kept coming. The two visitors and I were then treated to ringside seats as the fishing gang swam tightly together going west right in front of us. Some flew up front to get better scooping possibilities. And a few decided to fly toward the south island.

Oh, I should mention that Ducks Unlimited has provided two porta potties, as they do every year after the gate has been unlocked. They’re just by the parking area. Thank you. Thank you. 😊

I’ll attach a photo of Elsa. I finally found her in a few photos. She’s continuing to look good. I haven’t seen her join any of the fishing gangs yet. She seems to be quite active visiting with others on the south island though. I’ll also put some photos of the eastern pelican gang and then some of the pelican flyers that were going back to the south island. I found the late afternoon light from the west to be very nice—the water was a pleasant blue, and the pelicans’ eyes were especially vivid in my photos. After having to shoot mostly into the sun on the west side, the lighting off the blind was a welcome change.



Comment

I saw Elsa standing with a fishing gang that had decided to stop for a while--she's just to the left of the centre.



Comment

This is a portion of the fishing gang that I saw from the observation blind.



Comment

Here are two members of the fishing gang I saw from the observation blind.



Comment

These two pelicans were gliding together going west toward the south island.



Comment

I was using my 300mm prime lens when this pelican flew by the observation blind—there were actually three of them, but only one would fit in the frame.



April 23, 2022

😬 Avian Flu Report 😬

The reports that I've been sending about Elsa, the overwintering pelican, are mostly about happy and encouraging things, and I will continue to do that. But, I received an alarming email this morning from Greg Wagner, the Caretaker for the Frank Lake IBA (Important Bird Area). I had sent him an email, asking for information about the avian flu outbreak. Here are the main points that he sent to me:

1. In the past few days, five dead birds and two dying birds were found near the pipeline area at Frank Lake.
2. Three of the dead birds were taken to the University of Calgary for analysis.
3. According to Alberta Environment and Parks, outbreaks of the avian flu have been noted at a large number of lakes in southern Alberta.
4. Greg would like to know about any dead or dying birds (usually birds that are having a hard time coordinating their actions) that are found at Frank Lake—send any reports to [Greg Wagner](mailto:peyto601@gmail.com) at [peyto601@gmail.com]. Send any photos too. Greg will inform Alberta Environment and Parks, and the University of Calgary.

April 24, 2022

🙏 Avian Flu Report 🙏

I've been reading about avian influenza. There is no question that it is currently a problem for the health of birds. And, as before, it will eventually go away—and it will return sometime—but that does not mean that we have to remain unhappy about the fact that it is here now.

I've included below some of the websites that I found that provide what I think is useful information about avian influenza:

- Ducks Unlimited Canada, the organization that helped to create the Frank Lake Conservation Area, has provided information about avian flu at the following link: <https://www.ducks.ca/our-work/waterfowl/avian-flu-in-canada/>;
- The Government of Alberta website has posted the following: <https://www.alberta.ca/avian-influenza-in-wild-birds.aspx>;
- The Audubon.org website has compiled the following information: <https://www.audubon.org/.../north-american-birds-face...>;
- The Cornell Lab website posted: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/.../avian-influenza.../>;
- The Government of Canada website has provided: <https://www.canada.ca/.../avian-influenza-bird-flu.html>,
- and at: <https://www.canada.ca/.../avian-influenza-wild-birds.html>.

The outbreak of the avian influenza virus is not fair to Elsa, the pelican that survived overwintering at Frank Lake for two winters, and it's not fair to any of the other birds at Frank Lake or elsewhere. The birds, and we birdwatchers and bird photographers, have to do the best we can until the virus dissipates. If you look at all of the birds that are out there, it's evident that over the years birds have survived very well—and they will continue to do so.

I've attached a photo of a White-faced Ibis that I saw at Frank Lake yesterday. I intend the photo to represent the way things were with the birds that capture our attention, and the way that they'll be again.



April 25, 2022

😬 Elsa Report 😬

I've looked through all of my photos from my visit to Frank Lake on Saturday, and I haven't been able to find Elsa. I did notice that there were two resting pelicans on the top of the south island. I could even see their eyes. But, I couldn't see their bills.

Unfortunately, there have been two reports of dead pelicans at Frank Lake. I saw one of the pelicans, and I reported it to Greg Wagner. The pelican had a mating bump; therefore, it wasn't Elsa. I've asked Greg whether the other pelican had a mating bump, if he knows. Apparently, the second pelican was found in the northeast. I've not seen Elsa leave the south island since the migrating pelicans have arrived. I'll be going to Frank Lake later today, so I'll have a good look around—and this time, I'll remember to take my binoculars—in fact, I'm not going to write another line in this post until I've put my binoculars in my camera bag! 😊

There were many pelican fishing gangs on Saturday. It's interesting seeing them working the lake. Generally, there are about 20-30 pelicans in a gang. Sometimes, a few mini-gangs will splinter off and work by themselves. Cormorants are always hanging around to see what they can get. They assist the pelicans too by diving and chasing the fish up to the surface for the waiting pelicans.

For the first time this year at Frank Lake, I saw White-faced Ibises and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. I saw three of each species in front of the observation blind. [Martha Wilson](#) was taking some photos with me, and she saw a Western Grebe south of the blind. An amusing event happened while we were taking pictures. I saw a large white bird that was some distance from the nearest pelican fishing gang. I said, "Look, Martha, a pelican is all by itself." And then, after I looked more closely, I said, "That pelican is a swan, Martha (I think that she already knew that)!" 😊

I've been working with [Marlene Walsh](#) and [Renee Carrier](#) on an Elsa calendar for 2023. We hope, as we all do, that Elsa is able to migrate south this year with the other pelicans. However, we thought that we would like to make a calendar with her images, in order to honour and remember her second overwintering experience. We're using a few of my photos, and photos of Renee's drawings and paintings. We thought that we would try to raise some money to donate to Ducks Unlimited Canada—specifically to assist in the support of their Frank Lake Conservation Area. We've designed and created a first version of the calendar, but we don't have the printed proof yet.

The photo that I've attached shows one of the pelicans in a fishing party. I'll put two more fishing party photos in the comments. I'll put photos of a Yellow-headed Blackbird and a White-faced Ibis in the comments also. And I've added a photo of some Snow Geese. We saw a few hundred of them fly down to the lake. When there are a huge number of Snow Geese, one of their collective names is a blizzard. However, since we only saw a few hundred, I guess they were a squall. 😊

UPDATE

Martha Wilson alerted me that [Xiaodong Che](#) posted a photo of Elsa that she took on Saturday at Frank Lake. 😊



Comment

I saw this pelican fishing party from the observation blind.



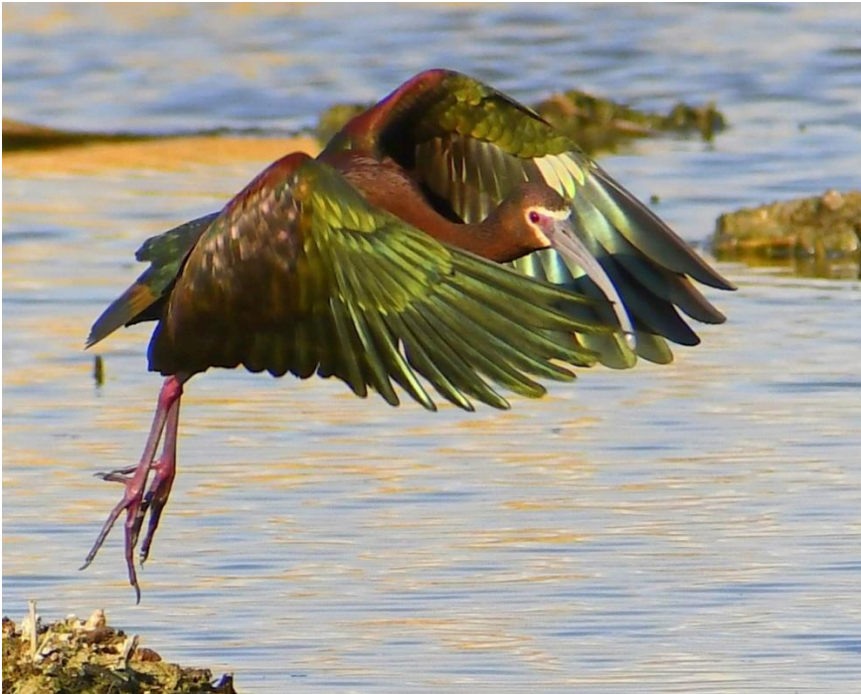
Comment

This photo shows a fishing mini-gang of pelicans.



Comment

Here's one of the White-faced Ibises that we saw in front of the observation blind. I remember that this was a favourite foraging location for two of these birds last year.



Comment

The male Yellow-headed Blackbirds always arrive at Frank Lake before the females. They get their territories established and then try to entice the females when they arrive.



Comment

This photo shows a few of the Snow Geese that flew to the lake.



April 26, 2022

😞Elsa Report😞

This is not a very satisfactory Elsa Report, because I didn't see Elsa when I was at Frank Lake yesterday. And the last photo that I've seen of her was taken by [Xiaodong Che](#) on Saturday. Sadly, there have been some dead pelicans found at Frank Lake; as far as I know, all of them had mating bumps--which means that Elsa should still be out there somewhere. This is an extremely unfortunate time, but I'm hopeful that Elsa's strength and resilience will prevail. And, for the sake of all of the birds, I'm hopeful that this problem will dissipate quickly.

Greg Wagner, the Caretaker for the Frank Lake IPA (Important Bird Area) keeps advising me on the happenings at Frank Lake. Whenever he becomes aware of dead birds at Frank Lake, he relays that information to a person who removes the birds, so that others, including predators, won't be infected. That person has sent a number of dead birds to the University of Calgary and to the Alberta Fish and Wildlife office in High River.

I'm sorry that I don't have more positive news to relate. But, as soon as I do, I'll let everyone know. One encouraging thing I can report is that I looked carefully on the islands and all around them at Frank Lake yesterday. And I did not see any dead birds, or any birds that seemed as though they were having any issues with mobility.

I'll attach some bird photos that I took yesterday at Frank Lake that may help us all to smile a little. 😊And I'll put in a couple of others that I thought were interesting catches. My main photo shows a Ring-billed Gull pair—it probably needs a caption. 😊



Comment

When pelicans preen their feathers they get into amazing contortions sometimes.



Comment

Not all pelicans are as easy going as Elsa is when it comes to gulls being near them.



Comment

When an avocet has to scratch an itchy spot, it does what it can do.



Comment

This photo isn't amusing, like the preceding ones hopefully are, but I thought that it was interesting--as three pelicans flew into the setting sun over the islands on the pipeline side yesterday evening.



Comment

I like this image of two avocets flying together down to the water north of the observation blind.



April 28, 2022

😊Elsa Report😊

This will probably be my last Elsa Report. I've been to Frank Lake three times since Apr. 20, but the last time I've been able to identify Elsa was on Apr. 20.

Elsa, the overwintering pelican, was such a tenacious, resilient, adaptable, determined, persevering, steadfast, and strong creature of nature (echoing many of the descriptive terms that [Renee Carrier](#) wrote on her lovely watercolour painting of Elsa). Elsa made the best she could of her lot in life. And, in so doing, she survived two long, cold winters at Frank Lake.

I don't know where Elsa is right now. My understanding is that she has managed to steer clear of the avian influenza, which has been rampaging through Alberta and many other areas of the world. Perhaps she was able to fly with some of the other pelicans to their mating colony. Maybe she and a male pelican have decided that they are right for each other, and they are preparing to nest. When their offspring hatches, she might well appear at Frank Lake, or other lakes, to assist her partner in obtaining the 150 lbs of food that each of their chicks will require in order to reach the point where they can be on their own.

It has been my privilege to follow Elsa on her winter trials, so that I could report on how she's doing to all of you. It has been very gratifying to read your thoughtful and heart-warming comments that so many of you provided. And I found your reactions to my posts to be overwhelming and extremely supportive. Thank you everyone! In a sense, we were all there at Frank Lake through the winter rooting for our Elsa to triumph over adversity.

After today, I'll be concentrating on compiling all of my Facebook posts and photos about Elsa. I hope to publish a book containing the material. [Marlene Walsh](#), [Renee Carrier](#), and I will continue to finalize a 2023 Elsa calendar. We are hopeful of finding an appropriate and convenient sales outlet. We decided on that effort in order to raise money for Ducks Unlimited Canada, the co-creator and manager of the Frank Lake Conservation Area.

I brought a lawn chair yesterday, to assist me in trying to take photos of all of the pelicans at Frank Lake. I was hopeful of picking out Elsa. Since I was sitting fairly still, I became part of the shoreline. Many bird species came by: Willets, Marbled Godwits, American Coots, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Lesser Yellowlegs, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and California Gulls.

I've attached a few photos of Elsa; I took them at various times during the past winter at Frank Lake.



Comment

Elsa, swimming toward her favourite fishing place near the pipeline at Frank Lake.



Comment

Elsa, showing her fishing prowess.



Comment

Elsa, surveying her domain.



Comment

Elsa, enjoying the day.



Comment

Elsa, flying down to join some of the gulls near the south island.



Comment

Elsa, stretching out her wings.



Comment

Elsa, flying into the sunset.



May 13, 2022

😊 2023 Elsa Calendars 😊

Elsa, the pelican that just spent two winters at Frank Lake, has seemingly resumed being a member of her pelican colony—at least, that’s what I have imagined has become of her. I haven’t been aware of her succumbing to the avian influenza or having any other problem.

Marlene Walsh, Renee Carrier, and I have finalized our 2023 Elsa Calendar. We placed an order for printing on May 11. We expect to receive the calendars by the end of May. We can easily order more, if/when they’re required.

So far, three stores have agreed to sell the calendars: The Wild Bird Store in Calgary, Wild Birds Unlimited in Edmonton, and Backyard Birds Nature Shop in Spruce Grove. I understand that orders will be possible online from the third store. And mail delivery will be available from any of the stores if needed. The price for each calendar will be \$20 for pickup in a store, or around \$25 if mailing is requested. 100% of the amount that we receive from the sales, less our printing and shipping costs, will be donated to Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC)—that organization is responsible for managing the Frank Lake Conservation Area. For those who may not know, it was through the efforts of DUC and their partners that the once completely dry Frank Lake was restored to be a “productive wetland important to hundreds of bird species” (from <https://www.ducks.ca/places/alberta/frank-lake/>).

I’ve attached the calendar cover photo, and I’ll put photos for the months of January through April in comments. The monthly Elsa images are 8.5”X11”. They are comprised of photos that I took, and photos of illustrations (three paintings and a drawing) by Renee Carrier.

We are looking forward to being able to offer everyone a 2023 Elsa calendar. We hope that you will enjoy it! I’ll let everyone know when the calendars have been sent to the outlet stores; and I will provide addresses and phone numbers for them.

*Elsa - the Frank Lake
Overwintering Pelican
2023 Calendar*

About the pelican:

American white pelicans normally migrate in October from Alberta to the southern U.S. states and Mexico.


One pelican (she has been named Elsa) did not migrate from Frank Lake in either 2020 or 2021, due to having an injured wing. Therefore, she had to spend the winter at Frank Lake.

Elsa has greatly improved her flying ability this winter, as compared to last winter.

She has access to open water through the winter because of the pipeline. She eats fish, she watches for predators, she exercises, and she keeps herself warm by snuggling into her feathers.

In April 2022, Elsa was joined by others of her species. We will know, when the pelicans migrate, in October-November 2022, whether Elsa will be able to migrate also.

Design by Marlene Walsh and John Reasbeck
Illustrations by Renee Carrier
Photos by John Reasbeck



Comment

This photo is the Elsa image for January.



Comment

This photo is the Elsa image for February.



Comment

This photo is the Elsa image for March.



Comment

This photo is the Elsa image for April.



May 15, 2022

I went to Frank Lake yesterday. I pulled off the road at the pipeline area parking. And I looked at the birds on the two islands. I didn't see any shapes that I thought looked like pelicans. I drove on to the observation blind parking.

I could see on the lake shore, way beyond the observation blind, that many pelicans, cormorants, and gulls had gathered there. That was a favourite resting place for the pelicans and their sidekicks last year. There were also two gangs of pelicans fishing east of the observation blind. It was difficult to be sure, because they weren't very close, but all of the fishing pelicans appeared to have mating bumps (unlike our Elsa—the last time I saw her anyway).

The fishing and resting pelicans were too far away for a good picture. But a couple of times a pelican flew reasonably close. I've attached one of those photos. I selected one that shows a gull as well as a pelican, so that you can see a size comparison between the two birds. My Sibley Guide to Birds states that Franklin's Gulls have an average length of 14.5" and an average wingspan of 3 ft., while American White Pelicans measure 62" in average length and 9 ft. for their average wingspan.

I've often seen gulls flying near pelicans. They don't attack pelicans, as they do when predators fly near their nesting areas. They just seem to like flying with them.



May 21, 2022

😊2023 Elsa Calendars😊

Our order of 2023 Elsa calendars arrived yesterday! Three large boxes of calendars were delivered late in the morning by Canada Post. The Canada Post delivery person must have been thinking “Why me?”😊

I intended to send the calendars to two stores in Edmonton and Spruce Grove by UPS today. But I didn’t get the boxes ready fast enough; UPS closed at 4pm. The calendars are all ready to go when UPS opens again on Tuesday. However, I was able to get to The Wild Bird Store in Calgary before their closing. Dave greeted me enthusiastically. They are looking forward to selling our Elsa calendars. Here are the store details:

The Wild Bird Store
5901 – 3rd St. SE
Calgary, AB
Phone: 403-640-2632

Kris Brown, an Alberta Birds member, is the store owner

I made a display sign for the calendars that I brought to the store. I’ll attach it to this post. I told Dave if they discover that they’re in need of more calendars to sell, we’ll be happy to order more—which should arrive in about two weeks after we place the order. I’ll give everyone the details of the other two stores that will carry Elsa calendars after I send them on Tuesday.

*Elsa - the Frank Lake
Overwintering Pelican
2023 Calendar*

20⁰⁰

All net proceeds will be donated to

Ducks Unlimited Canada

May 24, 2022

😊Elsa Calendar Update😊

As I posted on May 13, after we had placed an order for printing our Elsa calendar, The Wild Bird Store in Calgary (403-640-2632) has the 2023 Elsa calendars. You may either go there (5901 – 3 St. SE, Calgary) to pick one up or request that they mail a calendar to you (I think that postage should be no more than \$5 in Canada).

This afternoon, I've sent calendars by FedEx to the other two stores that will be selling the calendars. Their details are as follows:

Wild Birds Unlimited
12204 – 107 Ave. NW
Edmonton, AB
Phone: 587-521-2473

Backyard Birds Nature Shop
15-100 King St.
Spruce Grove, AB
Phone: 780-948-8597

The calendars should have arrived by Thursday or Friday.

In my May 13 post, I included Elsa photos for the first four months (8.5" X 11" prints) in the calendar. I'll attach photos for May-August to this post. The first two photos and the last one are photos that I took. The one for July is a photo of a drawing of Elsa done by Renee Carrier.

Don't worry if the stores don't have enough calendars for everyone. We hope that we started with a reasonable order. But, we can easily order more. We hope that everyone enjoys our 2023 Elsa calendar!



Comment

This photo is the Elsa calendar image for June.



Comment

This photo is the Elsa calendar image for July. It is a drawing of Elsa by Renee Carrier.



Comment

This photo is the Elsa calendar image for August.





Comment

Here's a photo of a Black-necked Stilt and the Stilt Sandpiper that I saw at Frank Lake yesterday.



May 27, 2022

😊Elsa Calendar Update😊

We wondered, with a donation project like the Elsa calendars, whether we should have ordered more or fewer calendars. Mostly, we were basing our demand estimates on what we saw in Facebook posts. And, keeping in mind that the calendars are for 2023, after all, we wondered whether members would wish to buy calendars now. Well, we received our first indication this afternoon. The Wild Bird Store called to say that over half their calendars had been sold already! That's terrific! I'm sure that the future recipient of our donation from the sales, Ducks Unlimited Canada, would want us to say Thank You—and we do too!

After we've checked with the other two stores in a few days, we'll make another order for calendars. They'll take 2-3 weeks to be delivered. So, in the meantime, the stores will take names and phone numbers if they run out.

In other posts, I've included the Elsa images that we selected for the calendar months from January – August. In this post I'll provide the rest of the 8.5" X 11" photos from September – December. I took the first three photos at Frank Lake. The last photo is of Renee Carrier's painting of Elsa at Frank Lake. The photo that I've attached initially is the Elsa image for September.

So that prospective calendar purchasers have the information about the three stores readily available, I've provided their details again below:

The Wild Bird Store
5901 – 3rd Street SE
Calgary, AB
Phone: 403-640-2632

Wild Birds Unlimited
12204 – 107th Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB
Phone: 587-521-2473

Backyard Birds Nature Shop
15 – 100 King Street
Spruce Grove, AB
Phone: 780-948-8597



Comment

This photo is the Elsa image for October.



Comment

This photo is the Elsa image for November.



Comment

The Elsa image for December is a photo of a watercolour painting created by Renee Carrier.



June 21, 2022

I went to Frank Lake yesterday. I saw more than 100 American White Pelicans on the east island, downstream from the water/effluent pipeline. It seems that the pelicans have decided that it's OK to gather there now, because I saw about the same number of pelicans on that island four days ago. They had been choosing locations east, southeast, and northeast of the observation blind for the previous month or so. The pelicans that are at Frank Lake are not nesting there; they're just getting fish—and socializing/resting.

Of course, when I see so many pelicans in one place, I can't help but think about Elsa. As I did on June 16, I took many photos up and down the island. I hoped that I might be able to locate Elsa, when I examined my photos later.

Unfortunately, I couldn't identify Elsa. However, I did take one photo of a pelican that is about as close to being an Elsa doppelgänger as I've been able to find since I lost sight of her. I've attached that photo. Except for some details on the bill, and the smooth back of the pelican's neck, the image reminds me very much of Elsa. Who knows, maybe the activities in which Elsa has been engaging, since I lost track of her, have caused some changes in her bill and plumage. I particularly like the confident stance the pelican in my image has taken, and the attention to the pelican being paid by the gulls is reminiscent of her entourage when Elsa was the only pelican at Frank Lake.

I'll certainly keep looking for Elsa every time I visit Frank Lake. As well as the photo I took of the pelican that's similar to Elsa, I'll post some other pelican images from yesterday in the comments.



Comment

When I was in the observation blind yesterday, eight pelicans flew by. They looked like they were heading for the island on the pipeline side of Frank Lake. One of them banked nicely, showing the full 9 ft. wingspan that white pelicans have. I've attached a photo.



Comment

This photo shows a few of the pelicans that were with the 100+ pelicans on the island down from the pipeline yesterday. Pelicans that had been fishing would fly in to join the group from time to time. One pelican is just arriving; it's looking for a place to land.



Comment

Normally, pelicans don't have their pouches extended when they're flying. The one in my attached photo does. I used to think that pelicans always looked like that. Notice the curled feet also 😊.



June 21, 2022

[Allen Kalas](#), of True North Stained Glass Design, creates stained glass sun catchers. He made one of Elsa, the overwintering pelican, in her resting position on her island at Frank Lake. He sent the beautiful work to me, because he said that he wanted to show his appreciation for the stories and photos of Elsa that I posted over the winter. Thank you very much, Allen! I received your exquisite sun catcher this afternoon. I have to find an appropriate place to hang it in order to maximize the rays of sun that catch our backyard windows. I took a photo of the sun catcher on a purple background with sunlight coming through a window. I've attached it to this post.



June 23, 2022

I estimated that there were at least 210 American White Pelicans at Frank Lake yesterday. I made the following estimates: 30 pelicans at the base of a power tower that most of the Double-crested Cormorants gather at, 80 pelicans at the base of a power tower east of the previous one, and 100 pelicans on the east most island on the pipeline side.

When I see pelicans at Frank Lake, I always look for Elsa, the overwintering pelican. I haven't been able to locate her since April 23. The way in which I look for Elsa is to take lots of pictures of pelicans, and then go through them carefully at home. I didn't see Elsa yesterday. However, I did capture images of pelicans doing interesting things.

A pelican likes to acknowledge his/her mate (perhaps, a "pelican kiss?") by grabbing them by the neck or bill with their bill. As I saw yesterday, a pelican might offer his mate some food in his pouch too—much as pelican chicks get food from their parents' pouches. I saw a male (because he's larger) apparently offering his mate some pouch food. Right after that, he grabbed her by her bill with his bill. I'll attach a photo of the pouch food offering to this post, and I'll place a photo of the bill grabbing in the comments.



Comment

Here's a photo of the male grabbing his mate's bill with his bill. I took it right after the photo with the pouch food offering that I posted already.



July 2, 2022

I made a composite image from three photos that I took in succession on July 1 at Frank Lake (you'll need to click on the attached image to see it entirely). The photos showed two pelicans that were flying together. The photo marked "1" is the first one, then "2", and finally "3" is the last one. The pelicans were flapping synchronously, so that the pelican that was slightly behind and off to the side could take advantage of the extra lift being provided by the airflow around the wingtip of the one that was in front (from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/.../birds-that-fly-in...>). There was something else happening also: the "ground effect." When a bird (or airplane) is within a wingspan of a flat surface like water, the airflow around its wings hits the water and provides a supportive cushion of air. Therefore, in my composite image, both pelicans were near enough to the water so that they were both saving energy by getting free rides (from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luXE6T3pBYY>).



July 6, 2022

It seems that the Elsa calendar sales are winding down. Thank you to all of our members who have supported our donation project! The stores that have been selling them went through all of their first allocation of calendars, and we ordered more—which were delivered to the stores some time ago. Two of the stores still have some stock. And the third one will soon have a few more. We don't plan on ordering any more. So, anyone who still wishes to get a calendar, should contact one of the stores. When it seems that the sales have stopped, we'll tally all of the proceeds and send a donation to Ducks Unlimited Canada. I'll ask all of the stores to hang onto any excess calendars that they might have, so that they would be able to provide some for those members who would still like to purchase some—after all, they are 2023 calendars, and this is only July 😊.

So that everyone has the information about the stores handy, I'll provide their details again below:

The Wild Bird Store
5901 – 3rd Street SE
Calgary, AB
Phone: 403-640-2632

Wild Birds Unlimited
12204 – 107th Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB
Phone: 587-521-2473

Backyard Birds Nature Shop
15 – 100 King Street
Spruce Grove, AB
Phone: 780-948-8597

The Wild Bird Store doesn't have any calendars left right now, but they will have some more soon—they're taking names though 😊.

I was at Frank Lake yesterday. And, of course, I looked for Elsa among the pelicans on the island. I couldn't find her. I couldn't find an Elsa look-alike pelican either. However, taking photos of pelicans is frequently a worthwhile pursuit, whether I find Elsa among my photos or not. I'm continuing to imagine that Elsa is with her pelican colony and is trying to continue the life that she had to temporarily leave behind while she survived another Alberta winter. I've attached a photo of a pelican that was flying to the island yesterday—presumably after doing some fishing on the other side of the lake. And I'll put a few more photos in the comments.



Comment

Here's a photo of a pelican doing pouch exercises beside another one that's possibly meditating 😊.



Comment

This pelican is not really an Elsa look-alike, but there are some similarities.



Comment

This pelican just has to get its feathers straightened out.



Comment

This pelican is looking for a place to land.

