

By Fred Smith
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The 2004 Hurricane season is over! What a relief for the residents of Florida and other southern states. For many of the states' aviculturists it was one for the record books - a season many of us would just as soon forget about. We must now take a deep breath and look back at what happened and see how we can be better prepared in the future. Being from a northern state, this was my first, second, third, and fourth hurricanes! I don't care if I ever endure another one. Notice that I didn't say 'enjoy' another one!

To see your road mentioned on TV as being in the path of an approaching hurricane is a feeling that cannot be described in words. Your heart wants to turn off the TV, but your head wants to watch even closer to what is being shown and said. For me, when I seen and heard the words, "The Eye of the Hurricane is now passing over (my town)," I can't tell you how I felt. Have I done enough to be prepared for this storm? As I looked at my wife and daughter, knowing that they were relying on my decisions, and me having not been in a storm like this before, did I do my best when I designed and built our aviaries? In an instant, every bird on our farm individually passed before my eyes! It's too late to change anything now; maybe I could have done such and such to make the buildings stronger. A Yellow Collared Macaw that is totally blind came before me in my mind. I should have caught it up and brought it inside! No, it would then have been totally unfamiliar with its surroundings, maybe it is better in its own cage as it knows where the food bowl and nest box are and would be in less stress.

As the winds became stronger and stronger and the rains became harder, I went to the window facing the buildings that housed most of the birds to observe what was taking place. I had planted bamboo, which had grown to nearly 15 ft high, around all the cages for protection from the hot sun and as a natural environment for the birds and I expected the bamboo to all be flat on the ground from the winds. I was totally surprised to find that, as the white horizontal sheets of rain were blowing over our nearby woods and down to the bird buildings, the high winds had blown the bamboo over against the cages, protecting them and causing the sheets of rain to pass up and over the buildings!

To those of you who may have lost trees that were planted near your cages as protection, I highly

recommend planting bamboo as your new shade. Most species of bamboo will crawl and multiply and will soon be the best shade, wind break and visual barrier that you could have.

Looking back, I guess having lived 'up north', dealing with tornadoes was better than dealing with these hurricanes. Tornadoes hit before you have time to worry! You only have a very short time to prepare. With hurricanes, on the other hand, the TV keeps warning you of their approach - sometimes 2-3 days in advance. This foreknowledge only seems to make your heart beat a little faster and the lump in your throat grows a little larger. You keep finding things that, at the time, seem as though they absolutely must be done before the storm's ultimate approach. It is only after the storm has passed that you realize how insignificant the idea really was.

I vividly remember after Frances passed by, which seemed to take days, even with the winds still so strong that I could hardly stand up and the rains as white sheets, I ran to the buildings to check on the birds. In my mind I could see a Hyacinth with its wing caught in its cage, or a cockatoo with its foot caught. As I approached the buildings, I could hear the screams of all the birds. I hurriedly entered the first building and as I ran down the aisle I saw all of the birds hanging upside down in their cages, making sure that every square inch of their body was wet from the rains! I wanted to just scream at them, and then I just broke down in a hard thankful cry knowing that they were all safe.

After rushing through all the buildings, I hurried in the house. I don't really know why I ran because I was already soaked. I flopped into my recliner, water dripping everywhere and shoes full of water, but I didn't care because I knew all the birds were safe.

Just days earlier, I had been put in charge of the Disaster Relief for the AFA, and I had only been sitting in that chair for a moment when I thought of all the other aviculturists that certainly must have needed help. Several different aviaries came to my mind that I had visited in the past, and I knew how they were set up, and could visualize what they may have looked like now. With no electricity or phones, I could not contact them to find out their needs, and so there wasn't much I could do to help them. I would have to wait until I got phone service before I could try calling or

checking my e-mails for a call for help. This time of waiting was hard to do, as I just knew there were other aviculturists who were in desperate need of help. But who? Where?

I knew that just because my aviaries hadn't sustained heavy damage didn't mean that other aviaries were as lucky. It didn't mean that I had built them any better than any other another aviary. It just meant that possibly I hadn't sustained winds as strong as another aviculturist, or maybe it was my large woods or the bamboo that had helped to protect my buildings. What worked in my situation may not have worked in another location, just as another setup may not have held up in my area.

How does a hurricane victim react after a storm has passed?

On one trip to Punta Gorda, FL (an area severely damaged by Hurricane Charley), Dwight Greenberg accompanied me to help an aviculturist that needed assistance. As we traveled through this town, we couldn't help but notice the actions of the residents. Many were just walking around, seemingly in a daze as if Charley had just hit, yet it had been several days since many of them had lost nearly everything! We saw one couple sitting on the front steps in front of what was once their home, but where now stood nothing more than a pile of rubble.

I will attempt to paint a visual picture for you of one scenario: As we drove down the narrow street, we saw a house with no roof or front wall. Both of the sidewalls were only partially standing, and the interior furnishings of the house were covered with shingles and pink insulation. On the left side, we saw a bedroom with its closet door removed, yet inside the closet, clothes were neatly hanging on their hangers, as if they had just been placed there. To the right and slightly to the back of the house appeared to be the kitchen. In the midst of the rubble we saw an elderly lady doing what she had done so many times in the past – sweeping the floor!

Another scene I still see so vividly: a son standing in the midst of his back yard, surveying all the downed trees and several bird cages all twisted among the debris. While he tried to decide where to start, his elderly mother was doing what she could to

help him. She grasped the lawn rake and started raking the leaves around all the branches. Only a few days before this, beautiful orchids had lined the now debris-filled yard.

Down the street, I saw several white tents set up in the parking lot of a local hospital. The roof of the hospital had given in to the strong winds of Hurricane Charley, and those injured were being treated in temporary all-enclosed medical tents. Emergency vehicles lined the curb awaiting a call for help.

Forty-four Days!

For 44 days spanning August and September, not a moment passed without Floridians either warily watching a storm, bracing for its coming, being battered, or trying to recover. There was numb disbelief as storm after storm emerged from the unusually hostile tropic waters. The storms ended 126 lives, destroyed over 25,000 homes beyond repair, and heavily damaged and additional 40,000 homes. It would cost well over \$20 billion to repair the damage. Many jobs were lost, and many businesses will never reopen. The fruit industry has been all but destroyed.

What have we learned from these storms?

As I was helping other aviaries that sustained substantial damage, I observed what worked in each setup and what didn't work as planned. Metal roof panels that were screwed to the rafters held, but metal sheets that were nailed down didn't hold as well and were blown off. Posts that were cemented in the ground held much better than the posts that were not. 4X4 posts held much better than round pipe or conduit that were put into the ground. Cages that were wired to their racks were torn loose, as the wind easily broke the wire. Those cages that were secured with hose clamps were, for the most part, still in their original places.

A major problem with many aviaries was the nest boxes that were mounted on the outside of the cages. Flying debris, such as tree branches, caused the nest boxes to be torn off of the cages, allowing the possibility for birds to escape. Nest boxes mounted inside the cages were largely left undamaged and were used by birds as their 'hide out' from the storm. Even in instances where a cage had rolled over, the nest boxes were still intact.

Prepare for the worst situation when building your aviaries. I not only had the rafters secured to the posts in concrete, but I also had mobile home anchors

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deep in the ground and the straps over the rafters and down the sides of the buildings. This not only kept the buildings from being lifted, but it also kept the buildings from swaying from side to side.

What are some of the 'essentials' that are needed to prepare for a hurricane season?

• *Generator*

You can expect the electricity to be out during and after a storm. It may only be for an hour, but it may be out for several days. When you have as many birds as we have, it takes several gallons of water just to supply a little for all the birds. Also remember that most security systems run on electricity and without it you may not have security to protect your birds. Many thefts happen during this period, as the would-be thieves know that your security system probably isn't working.

• *A means to heat water for hand feeding formula*

Some breeders used small coffeepots that run off of a car battery to heat the water needed for hand feeding. You can buy 'hand warmers,' which are small inexpensive packets that provide heat for several hours, for small babies when the brooders are not working.

• *Extra cage wire*

You may need to make repairs to damaged cages. Cage wire may be hard to find during this time, as others may have already purchased what was available. Know where your wire cutters are! This may be the one tool that you will need most.

• *Hurricane cages*

These are small cages that can be used as a temporary cage for your bird(s) during a hurricane. Make sure they are of ample size, as your bird(s) may have to be in them anywhere from a few hours to a few days.

• *Ant and mosquito spray*

With hurricanes comes lots of water. When the ground is full of water, ants and other pests will become abundant!

• *A small TV that runs off of 12 volt or batteries*

Many times the power goes off well before a hurricane even strikes! You will need some way to keep informed of the status of the storm. I purchased a 'power pack' that has a light, jumper cables, and a 12-volt outlet that will handle a small TV.

• *Batteries for Flashlights*

Remember, during a power outage, you aren't the only one who will be out trying to purchase batteries and they may not be available at the local store.

Can anything Good come of all of this?

If nothing else, it has drawn many aviculturists closer together and more aware of each other's needs. I was told by more than one aviculturist that survived Hurricane Andrew in southern Florida back in 1992, that the breeding season following the storm appeared to produce more babies than ever before! Could the sudden drop in the atmospheric pressure cause a change in the lives of the birds? I have noticed that my breeders have been much more vocal than usual since the storms, and I will have to admit that I am hand feeding more babies than I usually do at this time of the year. Maybe there is something to the theory? Only time will tell.

Sometimes I wonder if the Great Creator isn't looking down and smiling as His way of telling us how He approves of all that we go through to help protect His beautiful creation – the Birds!

In summary, what have I learned about Hurricanes? I have learned that I have a lot more to learn about these very strong acts of nature. Whether it is a Category 1 or Category 5 storm, it can change your life forever!

Plan now to attend the AFA 2005 Convention, where I will give a presentation with pictures of the "Hurricanes of 2004." There, we will discuss some of the aviaries, and how they fared the storms. ■



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