



THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF AVICULTURE, INC.  
PROUDLY PRESENTS

## FUNDAMENTALS OF AVICULTURE: LEVEL II

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By Rick Jordan

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A view of the aviary area housing mainly small *Poicephalus*. Two cages out of 20 remained upright.

# It Was A Dark And Stormy Night...

Story and photographs by Scott Lewis, Old World Aviaries

At about 3 a.m. Jan. 25, 2012 Linda and I awoke to intense thunder and lightning and the sound of a freight train apparently traversing our backyard. We hurried to the sun porch and saw a wall of green along with the remains of a patio cover. Obviously, a major branch from our 50-foot Live Oak had broken and fallen onto the patio. It was impossible to see anything else or exit from the backdoor, so we went to our guest bedroom, which has a window facing the backyard. Just outside the window, a miserable looking Timneh Grey was perched on the air conditioning unit framed by more green wall. I found a net, crawled out the window, and retrieved the Timneh. At that point, there wasn't much more we could do except wait for daylight.

Morning brought news that the damage was more severe than we had anticipated. About 15 feet of the 50-foot oak remained standing. Cages were everywhere at every angle, some crushed by the huge branches that fell from the tree. The patio cover was toast; grills, patio furniture and such were damaged beyond repair; sections of privacy fence were down; and the koi pond appeared to have absconded into the night.

The first order of business was inspecting all the cages, or at least what was left of them, for injured birds and performing stop-gap repairs on any cages that had openings through which

birds might escape. To our surprise, we found no injured birds. In fact, most of the birds appeared to be taking things in stride, calmly perching wherever perches remained or clinging to the sides of cages. However, one Timneh was later found dead in a cage that was crushed beyond recognition.

Later that day, we determined that 10 birds were missing, of which we eventually recovered 6. That's 10 out of about 150, many fewer than we had first feared. I give primary credit to reinforcing hog rings. Our cages are assembled with standard, 14-gauge, stainless hog rings. However, they have much heavier hog rings about every 1.5 to 2 feet and at each corner. I believe that without the heavier rings, many of the cage seams simply would have unzipped under the stress. I also give credit to well-constructed, heavy, metal nestboxes with secure closures that were bolted to the cages instead of simply hanging from them. Not a single nestbox was torn from a cage. In fact, not a single nestbox door was even open. Final credit goes to 12.5-gauge, 1/2-inch x 3-inch mesh wire instead of lighter wire.

The weak points in the cages were their 1-inch square, tubular steel legs. Many were bent beyond repair. However, damage to the bodies of the cages might have been worse with stronger legs. The cages would have been blown about regardless, and, instead of collapsing, stronger legs would have put more torque on the cage bodies. So, the relatively weak legs may have been a blessing in disguise.





Top, the neighbors got a surprise visit from our chicken coop. Above, a Timneh was found dead in a crushed cage, barely visible under oak branches. At right, the remains of a 50-foot Live Oak.



Clean-up and recovery has not been pleasant, has been expensive, and is still ongoing. It has been complicated by having to fire the primary person who was repairing the cages, placing the full burden on me. To further complicate repairs, our cages require interior access to replace legs, something I see now as a design flaw. Replacing a bent leg requires netting and moving birds.

In addition to cage repair, shade replacement is problematic. The live oak provided shade for about 20 cages, all of which were 4 x 6 or 4 x 8, which comes out to quite a bit of square footage. Shade could be built with lathing but would be a significant undertaking complicated by being needed in a fairly complex shape instead of a simple rectangle. Misting systems are messy and require replumbing any time a cage is moved. In addition, I have not been able to find a combination thermostat/timer to provide automatic control. Fortunately, this last summer was a fairly mild one for Austin, so a few portable misters sufficed. But, this is not a permanent solution.

A couple of days after the storm, the local weather authorities announced that we had been victim to an EF1 tornado, the weakest on the Enhanced Fujita Scale, not just a heavy thunder storm with freakish winds. Tornadoes are strange beasts. This one took the oak tree due west. North, and the tree would

have landed on our house; east, on the aviary building. It did not damage the aviary building save a few shingles or significantly damage the house, both of which are in spitting distance of the live oak. It left a large, deciduous, burr oak that is about 40 feet from the live oak completely undamaged. It left the live oaks and pecans in our front yard undamaged. So, although the damage was certainly bad enough, it could have been much worse. (As an ironic aside, years back I refused an opportunity to move to a beautiful facility about 70 miles north of our current location because the risk of severe weather including tornadoes was so much greater.)

I wish I could conclude with a long list of lessons learned and advice for our AFA members, but I really cannot beyond advising general disaster preparedness, such as having on hand avian first-aid supplies, live traps, nets, carriers, cage repair materials, and the number for an emergency veterinarian. These are things I'm sure most of our members already have. I'm not sure specific preparedness for something as potentially sudden and severe as a tornado is possible.

*Note: Linda and I would like to express our sincere thanks to the AFA Disaster Relief Fund for providing some of the materials needed for cage repair.*

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