

# The AFA Disaster Relief “Road Trip”



By Rick Jordan, Matt Schmit & Margrethe Warden

Soon after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, it became apparent that there would be many bird owners in the area that would need assistance. People needed food; they needed supplies for birds, dogs, cats, and their families as well. The magnitude of the area affected by Katrina was too large for one or two people to adequately assess the needs of bird owners and breeders, let alone assist them with those needs. Over 90,000 square miles of land were affected by Hurricane Katrina, making it one of the largest natural disasters in United States history.

The day after the hurricane made landfall, South Central Regional Director Matt Schmit began to identify those people who were in need of assistance and began to determine what type of assistance was needed. AFA delegates Terry and Loretta Perez in Louisiana came forward with the offer to help distribute food and supplies in their area. Matt coordinated a shipment of several hundred pounds of seed, graciously donated by Janis Clark of Orchid Tree Exotics, to be sent directly to Terry and Loretta for distribution. There was hope that feed and supplies could reach the outlying areas of New Orleans not affected by the floods and the other parts of Louisiana that were affected by the storm. Unfortunately, this initial shipment of seed was returned because the truck driver didn't want to go into the affected area, even though the trucking routes were confirmed to be open before the seed was

shipped. This caused some major frustration, not only to those who were trying to help, but also for those who were trapped inside a strange new world with no electricity, no water, and no way to get the needed supplies to survive or to feed their animals.

Fearing that no food would be able to reach the affected areas, Matt purchased and delivered 500 lbs. of seed to Terry and Loretta to help those in dire need, while everyone waited for other shipments of food and supplies to arrive. Eventually, several small shipments of feed were able to be sent directly to Terry and Loretta for distribution. Additionally, Matt coordinated delivery of Hagen food donated by Marcia Hamlin of Aviary Supply, and food donated by Pretty Bird, to various individuals in the affected areas.

Coordinating disaster relief efforts in Mississippi and Alabama proved to be even more difficult due to the widespread power outages, the inability to determine who needed help, and the inability to determine the best ways to get the help into the area. It was determined that an “AFA Disaster Relief Road Trip,” led by CITES Chair Rick Jordan, would be the best solution for this particular problem, and plans for this endeavor began immediately. Rick was an ideal person for this task, due to his familiarity with the Gulf Coast and with his past experience dealing with hurricanes. Ten days after the hurricane made landfall, the majority of the roads into the affected areas were either still not open or not safe to drive



**Thousands of dogs and cats were housed at an agriculture arena at Louisiana State University awaiting to be reunited with their owners.**

on, and the State Police of Louisiana and Mississippi were instructing people to stay out of the areas until the roads could be secured. This obviously delayed the initial onset of the AFA Disaster Relief Road Trip.

Despite the delay, the Disaster Relief team continued planning and coordinating. Both Sunseed and Kaytee sent donated seed to their Houston, TX distributor, Central Garden and Pet. In addition to handling all the incoming shipments of food, Central offered to place several pallets of donated food on one of their trucks and met with Terry and Loretta Perez during one of their routine deliveries so that some supplies could get into the area a little sooner.

Georgia State Coordinator Margrethe Warden offered to help with coordination efforts in Alabama and Mississippi. Margrethe contacted Cindy Bowden, AFA delegate for the Central Alabama Avicultural Society, who in turn put Margrethe in touch with Michael Camire, owner of Bird Buffet N' Things in Prattville, AL (just outside Montgomery). Michael generously offered the use of his warehouse to store donated food and supplies from Avitech, D & D Commodities (L'Avian), Hagen, Lafeber's, Pretty Bird, Roudybush, and ZuPreem. Over the next 2 weeks, this warehouse became the major staging area for disaster relief efforts.

Meanwhile, rental of a 15 foot truck was secured, thanks to a donation by Genny Wall of California. Not only did Ms. Wall offer to fund the cost of the truck rental and related expenses, but she went so far as to

make her donation immediately accessible. Penske Truck Rentals in Austin, TX offered to rent a truck to AFA for less than one third of the normal price once they realized the intended purpose of the rental.

As soon as the roads were clear, the relief effort was underway. Rick purchased humanitarian supplies, as well as bird, dog and cat food to be distributed in addition to the food that was being donated. The truck was loaded in Austin with some supplies, then made its way to Houston, where Rick met up with Jean Jordan, owner of the Houston bird store, Adventures in Birds. Together, they loaded the truck with feed and veterinary supplies that Jean had collected from various vendors and vet clinics in the Houston area and proceeded to Central Garden and Pet's warehouse, where they spent hours loading the food donated by Sunseed and Kaytee. In addition to the feed donated by Sunseed and Kaytee, Central also donated pet carriers and other much needed supplies to the relief effort.

Once the truck was loaded, Rick and Jean left Houston with over 4,500 lbs. of supplies (way over the truck's limit!) for Louisiana to meet with Terry and Loretta Perez in Lafayette, LA. Between the Perez' and AFA Louisiana State Coordinator Jeanne Castiex, supplies were carried into New Orleans and the surrounding areas where the AFA truck was unable to travel. At midnight of the second day of travel, in a dark hotel parking lot, another load of bird supplies and food was unloaded from the truck and reloaded into the Perez' vehicle and sent on its way to various

people in need along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana. Driving through the night, Rick and Jean headed to Baton Rouge to offer assistance to the newly formed Parrot 911 Rescue center. They also stopped at Louisiana State University (LSU), where literally thousands of dogs and cats were being housed until their owners could return to claim them. More food and supplies were dropped off in Slidell, LA with Dr. Janice Boyd, AFA Conservation and Research Chair, to be distributed into the north shore area and the affected areas of eastern Louisiana.

With the entire truckload of food and supplies now empty, Rick and Jean proceeded to Prattville, Alabama to meet with Margrethe Warden and Michael Camire to get the keys to the Bird Buffet N' Things warehouse. At first glance into the warehouse, it seemed as though the relief effort may need some additional volunteers. Nearly 25,000 lbs. of food had been already been delivered to Michael Camire's warehouse, with more food scheduled to be delivered any day. Even though the sight of all that donated food was emotionally moving, work had to be done if the first truck load of supplies was going to make it out of Prattville. In addition to allowing AFA the use of their warehouse, a generous offer in itself, Michael and his family showed up to help load food into the truck.

All in all, Rick and Jean spent the next 12 days making daily deliveries of food and supplies from the warehouse in Prattville to various locations along the Gulf Coast. On each trip, an average of 2,500 lbs. of food and supplies were moved into the devastated

areas of Mississippi and Alabama. Several more trips were also made to Slidell, LA to drop off more food with Dr. Boyd. Trips were also made to Mobile, Alabama, where Southeastern Regional Director Nancy Speed met the supply truck and assisted with distribution. On one of these trips into Mobile, Rick and Jean met up with Alabama State Coordinator Maureen Gibbons and several members of the Alabama Exotic Bird Club, who rented a storage unit that was filled with food for long-term assistance to their club members as well as other aviculturists in the area.

A special trip was made to Vancleave, Mississippi, to visit the ranch of Mary Ann Harris. Upon approaching her driveway, it was easy to see that all of her aviary buildings and barns had collapsed during the storm. Her house was draped in blue plastic tarps, and her windows were boarded up with plywood. Her birds were housed in temporary cages in her garage, awaiting the construction of new aviaries. After delivering food and supplies to Mary Ann, she expressed concern for a friend of hers in Gulfport, and since many of the main roads were closed and many of the bridges were washed out, it was agreed that it would be best for Rick and Jean to follow her on the back roads to check on her friend, Willie Meskew.

The road to Willie's farm was covered with electrical wires and telephone cables. Willie was without food for his horses, goats, chickens



**Emily Ladnier of Gulfport, Mississippi proudly poses with her new bicycle.**





**Jean Jordan loads food and supplies into the delivery truck for another busy day of disaster relief.**



**The aviaries of Mary Ann Harris of Vancleave, Mississippi were totally destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.**

and parrots. Food for all of Willie's animals was delivered, admittedly putting a smile on his face for the first time in weeks.

From Willie's place, Rick and Jean drove the streets of Gulfport to get an idea of just how bad the damage was from Hurricane Katrina. Having lived in this area in the past, Rick was stunned by the devastation. There was not a single house that did not sustain damage or had not been completely destroyed. Most of the businesses along Highway 49 had been washed away or were boarded up from wind damage. Gulfport was a disaster! Along one of the side streets near the beach, Rick and Jean came across a little girl pushing herself along on a beaten up bike with no chain, two flat tires, and bent wheel rims. They asked her if the hurricane did that to her bike and she replied, "Well, it was not the best bike before the hurricane, but I'm keeping it till my mother buys me a new one." They chatted with her mother for a while about the damage to her house and the area, and then went on their way ... to Wal-mart, where they secretly bought Emily Ladnier a new bicycle and the appropriate safety equipment. Needless to say, she was thrilled; her mother cried.

In addition to the many businesses and individuals mentioned in the above article, AFA would also like to thank the following for their generous contributions and donations. Without your assistance and support, the Disaster Relief efforts would not have been possible:

Research Associates Lab  
Adventures in Birds (and its customers)  
Hill Country Aviaries, L.L.C.  
Birds of Paradise  
ABC Animal & Bird Clinic  
Animal and Avian Hospital  
Gulf Coast Veterinary Specialists  
Southeast Animal Clinic  
Grand Park Animal Clinic  
Reflections of Light

Parapet, Inc.  
Lone Star Pet Supply  
Wabash Antiques and Feed  
Kingsland Blvd. Animal Clinic  
Texas Medical Supplies

Finally, AFA would like to thank all of the many people who generously donated to the Disaster Relief Fund, of which there are far too many to name individually. Your contributions are greatly appreciated. ■



**The Alabama Exotic Bird Club rented a storage unit that was filled with food for long-term assistance to their club members as well as other aviculturists in the Mobile area.**



**The sight of birds housed temporarily in garages or other intact buildings was not uncommon for many aviculturists in the areas affected by Katrina.**

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