

Emergency Evacuation of Birds in Harm's Way

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It usually happens when you least expect it, that telephone call in the middle of the night, that weather forecast, that sudden realization that *I've got to evacuate my birds right now!* Since we usually have about as much time to prepare for that vague "it'll never happen to me" emergency as you just had while reading this paragraph, *the time to prepare is now!*

Be it a hurricane, earthquake, flooding, tornado, or firestorm, few aviculturists are immune from the possibility (dare I say eventuality) that evacuation of the breeding stock and/or pets may be necessary to save their lives. Of course, in the case of earthquakes, tornados, and firestorms, such as the recent ones in southern California, little or no warning is usually the case. But even if there is no warning before a disaster occurs, preparation for evacuation might still be beneficial for moving the survivors out of a disaster area.

There is one cardinal rule to planning a safe evacuation of birds. This is: *compile all necessary equipment in an easily accessible location and do not use it for any other purpose.* This, of course, is easier said than done. How many of us have, in our possession, *right now* enough crates to safely move *all* the birds in our collections? Even if you purchase enough crates for this purpose initially, it is so easy to use a crate here and there until that time that the emergency actually occurs and then there aren't enough crates. Therefore, it is important to establish this crate cache and not to use them for any other purpose. The same is true of nets. Enough nets of sufficient size and variety should be on hand. These are the two basic elements of bird evacuation. Having enough vehicles to move the birds if necessary is also important but, since we never know when this might be necessary, this aspect is a bit more difficult to control. If you don't have enough capacity in the vehicles usually on hand, it is wise to keep a list of people with telephone numbers

by the telephone whom you could call on for help in the event of an emergency.

There are other items that I recommend aviculturists keep on hand in the event of an emergency. Each situation will dictate which of these items might be important in a given emergency. I would recommend keeping all of these items handy.

Emergency Plan

Write an emergency plan, make several copies of it and make sure that everyone who might be involved in an evacuation or emergency has a copy of this plan. Keep several copies of this plan in your emergency cache. Plan an order of evacuation based on efficiency of evacuating the largest number of birds in the shortest possible time. You might wish to stage a practice drill without actually removing the birds to familiarize everyone with emergency procedures. Discuss worst case scenarios with everyone potentially involved. Make sure that everyone is familiar with the emergency equipment cache and knows their own role in the situation.

Water

Keep enough bottled water for yourself, family members, employees, birds, and other animals for several days. Pipes break, electricity fails well pumps, contaminated water comes in from the purification plants — any of these things might happen.

Food

Keep enough food on hand that does not require refrigeration for any people or animals that might be involved in an emergency. It is hard to estimate how much might be necessary but keep some reserves so that there is enough to last for several days.

Flashlights and Candles

Emergencies often happen in the middle of the night and loss of electricity is often a factor so flashlights in the emergency cache can be invaluable. Batteries should also be included. Candles might also come in handy. Don't forget matches.

First Aid Kits

Emergency first aid equipment should be kept for both people and animals. Most of us are familiar with

items we might expect to see in a first aid kit for humans. Many items that are necessary for avian first aid are only available through a veterinarian and it is advisable to consult your avian veterinarian for recommendations on what your kit should contain. Your own kit should be tailored to the needs of your collection, your level of expertise, and the probable nature of your emergency. Suggested items for a kit might include Lactated Ringer's or Pedialite, tuberculin syringes, ophthalmic drops/ointment, topical ointment for injuries or burns, gauze and bandage tape/materials, antibiotics (oral and injectible), dexamethazone, oxygen, and equipment for gavage (tube) feeding.

Extension Cords and Generator

These two things might not be appropriate for all situations but, if you have egg incubators and/or isolettes for babies that require electricity for heating purposes, these two things are essential. Don't forget three-prong plug adaptors for the three-prong plug extension cords and gas for the generator. Make sure you know how to use the generator before you need to and keep it in an easily accessible place.

Radio and/or Cellular Telephone

Communication or contact with the outside world might be crucial in your situation in the event of loss of electricity and/or telephone service.

There are other things that you might think of that would be important to your particular potential disaster. The purpose of this short article is not to be a complete guide to any emergency but rather to be a reminder that none of us is immune to this possible situation. It is hoped that you will consider an emergency plan before the emergency occurs.

Editorial note: the author lost most of her breeding stock in a recent southern California firestorm. Babies and youngsters in brooders and incubators in the house were saved but all the outdoor breeders proved to be impossible to evacuate at 2:00 a.m. in the morning with NO ADVANCE TIME to catch up these birds. Not even opening the aviary doors worked since these types of birds don't fly well at night; only more panic resulted. In the case where adult birds sleep in their nest boxes, it may possibly have helped if the nests were quick releases attached to the outside of the aviary, but this constitutes whole rethinking of security and construction problems for aviaries in vulnerable areas. ●