

## Bird Cold-Weather Emergencies

### Keep your bird warm during cold winter weather

By Rebecca Sweat

Prepare your bird for cold weather. Courtesy Sally Garver, South Carolina

Winter weather is a little easier to prepare for. For most of us, all that may be required is to make sure the thermostat's turned up to at least 65 degrees Fahrenheit and maybe share a little of your "comfort food" with your birds, especially if it's warm and starchy! A heated perch is also a terrific idea.

If you live in an older house or apartment building, you may not have a furnace, or maybe you simply have a wall heater, which you're not going to leave on all the time. This is common in Southern California, where daytime temperatures during the winter months are often in the 70s and 80s, but at night the mercury can dip down into the 30s and 40s. You may be fine being a little chilly at night and then just turning on the wall heater for a few minutes in the morning to heat up your place.

Your birds, however, will be feeling the stress of a 30 degree (or more) change in temperature in a 24-hour period. For them, you may want to get a portable space heater to keep the room they're in at a constant warm temperature. Space heaters are also good to have on hand, just in case your furnace decides to break down in the middle of January.

When choosing a space heater, "be very careful to read the product description to ensure that there is no Teflon or other nonstick coating in the heater or heat lamp," warned Missouri veterinarian, Julie Burge, DVM. "It is a good idea to run it for the first time on maximum in another part of the house well away from the bird to allow any sort of chemical coating that may have been applied to burn away before it is used near the bird."

The heater should not have exposed coils, which would be a potential fire hazard because of the dust or down feathers from your bird. Oil-filled radiator heaters work well, since the heating element inside is fully sealed and they do not produce any fumes or flames.

What about covering your bird's cage to warm it up? "That does nothing to keep your bird warm," said Larry Nemetz, DVM, an exotics-only veterinarian in California. He compares it to a person lying down in a canopy bed on a cool night and then suspending the blanket on top of the canopy, 6 feet above his or her body. "The person's body heat is not enough to heat up all that space underneath the canopy," he said. "The same is true when you cover a bird's cage. The average bird lives in a cage that has 20 times the airspace of its body. A bird can't generate enough heat to heat up the entire airspace under the cover."

Again, there's always going to be unexpected situations, like power outages or broken thermostats on frigid winter days. If that happens and your bird seems hypothermic, there are some steps you can take immediately.

For a small bird, you can actually put the bird against your body inside your clothing. "Make sure you are not holding it too tightly and compressing the chest so the bird can breathe," cautioned Dr. Burge. Simply wrapping your parrot in a towel or blanket will conserve the body heat it has, but will not help it warm up quickly if there is hypothermia.

For hypothermia, you will need to provide your bird with a heat source of some kind. You can use a hair dryer to blow heat underneath your bird's feathers, put your bird's feet in a pan of warm water, or put the bird in the bathroom and run hot water in the shower to steam up the room like a sauna. North Carolina avian veterinarian, Gregory Burkett, DVM, recommends placing a heating pad on your bird, or massaging your bird's feet so the blood flow will continue in the feet. "The heat should be applied to the entire body, but especially to the feet," he said. If the situation appears serious, apply first aid and get to an avian veterinarian immediately.

Certainly when it comes to extreme temperatures, a lot of this is common sense. If you feel too hot or the meteorologist is predicting a scorcher of a day, get out the fan or set the thermostat to a comfortable temperature. If the weatherman's forecasting subzero temperatures for the day, cancel any car trips for your parrot and crank up the furnace. If you make these accommodations, your bird — like Goldilocks — will find the temperature "juuuust right."