

Evacuate Your Pet Bird In A Fire

Keep your pet bird's health in mind in the chance you have to evacuate your home.

By Crystal Apilado

Be prepared with a plan and supplies in case you have to evacuate your home with your pet birds in a wildfire. Courtesy Jessica and Jeremy VanDerkern, Vermont

Fires can quickly change course and head toward your home, and in order to save your flock you must evacuate. Be prepared and ready for an evacuation from your home. Fires can be especially harmful for your bird and its delicate respiratory system because of the heavy smoke and ash in the air.

Make a Bird Disaster Kit

Have a bird disaster kit ready to go next to your bird's carrier. A disaster kit will have supplies you'll need if you have to leave your home quickly. It should contain water, food and treats and other supplies to help your bird get through the night. However, if you have more time to prepare for an evacuation, make sure you take into consideration the amount of time you might have to be gone from your home. Pack a box with enough food and fresh water for your birds to last more than one night away.

Have extra toys, food and water dishes, newspapers (for cage clean up), paper towels and any medication that your bird is taking, said Bonnie Kenk, president and founder of Parrot Education & Adoption Center (PEAC) in San Diego. "Anticipate that even if you are not in an area being evacuated (yet) you need to prepare for it none the less."

Dan Hill, vice president and managing director of The Lily Sanctuary in Westminster, California, also suggested you have clean water not just for drinking, but also for cleaning up your bird and other purposes. "Have both clean water for drinking purposes in one container, and another small pail or bucket with a lid on it with clean water for clean up or towel soaking," Hill said.

Prepare Your Bird

Practice putting your bird in its carrier, and use the same carrier for vet visits or other travel trips. This helps prepare your bird to being put into a carrier and for a possible overnight stay in a carrier. On the bottom or side of the bird carrier, write your bird's name, your name and contact information, said Julia Shattuck, host of the ParrotTalk list for Rescue and Rehab.

Another option is to tape a clear document holder to the bottom of the carrier and inside include more detailed information about your bird and a list of emergency contacts in the chance you are separated from your bird.

Kenk said to have your carriers read to go, at all times, with clean lining and set them near the door or front closet.

Leaving Your Home and Have a Plan

Make sure that you have enough bird carriers for each bird in your home, said Jerry Jennings, bird breeder and San Diego regional coordinator for the American Federation of Aviculture.

Practice putting your carriers in your car, and make sure that they all fit. Jennings said to make sure you have enough vehicles to transport all of your birds to safety. He said it took nine trucks total to get all of his birds to safety from the Southern California wildfire.

Make a list of friends, veterinarians and other bird-friendly resources, and have it in your bird disaster kit. Have an emergency plan and a back-up plan ready of evacuation points. In the case of a fire, you may have to change your safe location. Jennings said that he knew of bird owners that had to evacuate a second time when the fire switched paths and headed toward the first home they had fled to.

Protect From Smoke

Once in your car, keep the windows closed and turn on your air conditioner so it recycles the air in the cab.

If you are worried your bird is having problems breathing or will as you evacuate, drape a damp sheet over its carrier or cage and some of the soot and dust will be captured in the sheet, said Sybil Erden, executive director of The Oasis Sanctuary (a bird rescue in Arizona). Erden said that it is important to get your birds indoors than to leave them out in the

smoke for too long.

Dr. Larry Nemetz, an avian veterinarian at the Bird Clinic in Orange, California, said that heat, dehydration and smoke from the fire could pose a big health issue for pet birds. "There could be toxins within the soot," Nemetz said. If you think that your bird could be suffering from one of them, bring it to a veterinarian for fluids and oxygen.