

Help Your Pet Bird Survive A Disaster

Plan ahead with these tips to keep your pet bird safe from harm when a disaster strikes.

By Susan Chamberlain

Be prepared for a disaster and plan ahead of time to keep your birds safe. Courtesy Dave & Jannet Michael

Could you save your pet bird in the event of a disaster? Would emergency personnel know to search for your bird in case of a flood or fire? What would happen to your pet bird if you were unable to get home due to a medical emergency, automobile accident, weather conditions or other unexpected situations?

- 1) Be prepared! Leave an ample supply of food and water for your bird before you leave for work or a day out. But, resist the urge to overfeed your bird. Chances are good you'll be home again in the evening, and if you supply your companion with a week's worth of food every morning, you'll soon have an obese bird.
- 2) If you do wish to provide several days' sustenance, try using a gravity feeder for seed or pelleted food.
- 3) A large drinking water bottle can provide your pet with water for up to a week, depending on capacity. Teach your bird to drink from a bottle. Monitor it closely to be sure it is actually drinking from the bottle. Some birds have a tendency to stuff the nozzles with food, and others learn to shower under the nozzles. Know your bird's habits before you rely solely on a water bottle for its drinking water.
- 4) Have an emergency plan. How would you escape from your home if there were a fire or flood? Develop an evacuation plan. Then practice it. Install smoke detectors, and test them once a month. Smoke will kill your pet birds before the fire will. Keep your bird's travel cage or carrier handy. If you don't own a carrier, keep a pillowcase within reach, and put your bird inside if you have to escape quickly. Decide on a destination. Pets are usually not permitted in public shelters. Decide well in advance where you'll go in case of emergency.
- 5) Have a bird buddy. Make a pact with a friend that you'll check on one another frequently. Give relatives your buddy's name and phone number. Exchange house keys, and agree to care for each other's pet birds in case of emergency. Provide one another with notarized, written statements granting access to each other's homes. Law enforcement may deny access without documentation. If emergency personnel or animal rescue organizations attempt to gain entry to save your pets, they may be bogged down in bureaucracy for several days.

Notify your friend if you'll be out of town. Don't know anyone in the area? Join a bird club. Carry an emergency notification card in your wallet. Make a card that reads: "I have pets that need daily attention. To ensure their care, please contact: _____." List your bird buddy or bird sitter as the contact person. Some bird clubs have these cards printed as a service to their members and the community.

- 6) Make a bird care chart. Think of it as a list of instructions for a bird-sitter. Include your veterinarian's name and phone number, feeding directions and any special instructions necessary. Make it simple, but noticeable. Print it up, laminate it, and attach it to your refrigerator door with magnets.
- 7) Make strategic use of signs. Paste a sign inside your mailbox where your mail carrier can see it. "I have pets that need attention. If my mail is not picked up for several days, please contact: _____." Post an "In case of fire, please rescue my pets" sign in several windows at your home. List the type (birds, dogs, etc.) and number of pets inside. You can also include an emergency telephone number
- 8) Use a central station fire and burglar alarm system. Give the monitoring company telephone numbers for whoever will care for your pets in an emergency situation.
- 9) Make a will. Many pet bird species have life expectancies longer than our own. Have you provided for your pet bird in the event of your death or incapacitation? It is not a good idea to include instructions for your bird's immediate care in your will, as the will may not be located or read right away.