

BIRD TALK Editor's Note: Fire Up Your New Year's Resolution

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My work day usually starts out the same. Wake up, greet the flock, take the flock in the shower with me, feed the flock, dress, grab a cereal bar or piece of fruit, and then head out the door to join the thousands of other commuters on the freeway crawl to the office (this is Southern California after all).

For a couple days back in October, driving to work was anything but typical. As I approached my exit, smoke filled my car; the result of being downwind of the Santiago fire that raged on nearby hillsides, one of many fires that engulfed Southern California and devoured more than 1,500 homes and businesses.

Our parking lot had a heavy dust of ash and soot, whisked about by a dry wind. Being journalists, we of course, were on the beat. BirdChannel.com editor Crystal Apilado contacted local bird organizations and bird owners who had to evacuate their homes at a moment's notice; not an easy task when you multiple birds to transport. (One breeder had nine trucks lined up to move his birds to safety). These people were prepared and got their birds out with relative ease.

I learned that it is one thing to know what to do in case of emergency, but it's another thing to be able to actually do it: A few days prior to this firestorm, I brought my conure, Ollie, to the office for a videoshoot. I was a good 20 minutes late that morning because I couldn't locate his carrier (I found my backup carrier in the garage) and, worse, I couldn't get Ollie to willfully go in it. Ollie had never seen this carrier before, and you would have thought I was trying to feed him to an alligator. I eventually won our cat-and-mouse game and was able to buckle the carrier to my passenger seat.

If that fire was raging near my home, and the police and fire departments were driving up and down my street saying "Evacuate," I would have been the late-breaking news item about the crazy lady trying to budge full-sized bird cages out the front door. This is simply unacceptable. There's now a separate carrier for each bird below their cages with pillowcases inside (in case there's no time for a polite Step up request.) We've done a few practice drills and things have gone a lot more smoothly. Yes, it's the start of a new year, so what better resolution than to make me and my pets mobile and ready to roll at a moment's notice? Speaking of mobile, this is our special diet and fitness issue, so let's all make healthy foods and exercise a priority for our birds, and ourselves, in 2008!

— Laura Doering, BIRD TALK Editor