

Tropical Storm Fay Doesn't Faze Florida Bird Stores and Bird Breeders

Parrot stores prepare for hurricane weather but suffer little damage.

By Angela Pham

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Courtesy Gloria Balaban

Birds ride out the storm in temporary carriers in the "safe room."

Courtesy Richard Horvitz

Birds are arranged in double or triple stack cages to evade any rising water.

Hurricane shutters? Check. Backup generators? Check. Surplus food and water? Check.

Bird breeders and bird store owners in Florida braced themselves for Hurricane Fay. The state had been warned, and the aviaries and bird shops were ready.

But instead, Fay took form as a less-threatening tropical storm, and area parrot breeders and shop owners were relieved. While Tropical Storm Fay certainly spread devastating damage throughout Florida, many bird breeders and bird stores were spared.

At Golden Cockatoo, an exotic bird boutique in Deerfield Beach, Florida, hurricane shutters were in place and extra drums of drinkable water were stored. The store's own water supply even boasts a reverse osmosis system to ensure birds won't go thirsty or drink bacteria that often taints water in hurricane season. These preparations were made after past storms battered the business' old location in prior years, said Richard Horvitz, business partner and co-owner of the store.

The new location was chosen specifically to enable the use of hurricane shutters, Horvitz said. The new building also sits on a higher elevation to avoid flooding, and as a precautionary measure, birds are arranged in double or triple stack cages to evade any rising water.

Thankfully, Horvitz added, Tropical Storm Fay was nothing like the last hurricane, Hurricane Wilma, which stirred the birds in his shop because of the noise of the large-scale hurricane.

"This wasn't really anything for us," he said. "A lot of rain, thunder and lightning, minor, minor flooding, one or two trees uprooted; really nothing, and the winds maybe got to 40 or 45 mph where we are."

Likewise, at Shady Pines Aviary in Lake Worth, Florida, the bird breeding facility was well-prepared for potential hurricane damage. In 2004, the bird breeding facility suffered property damage and downed trees, said Gloria Balaban, owner of the aviary. A poured concrete "safe room" was constructed as part of the original aviary design, and the birds were evacuated to the room for the first 2004 hurricane, Balaban said. During the second evacuation three weeks later, Balaban realized there had to be a better way that would be less disruptive to the birds.

With this thought, hurricane shutters were added to the entire bird facility. But for Tropical Storm Fay, the shutters weren't even needed. Several extra weeks' worth of feed is stocked throughout hurricane season in case severe damage to the area causes deliveries to be delayed, and a generator is available in case of interruption of power, as water for the facility is provided by a well.

"This was just severe storms, lots and lots of water, but no wind," Balaban said.

Donna Kay, owner of the Mega Bird Store in Cocoa, Florida, had similar thoughts about Tropical Storm Fay similarly.

"It wasn't a lot of mile per hour winds in this storm," Kay said. "I just made sure stuff was up off the floor, no birds by the windows."

Though Kay did have to spend time mopping up leaking water out of the Mega Bird Store, she said the clean-up was primarily moving the birds back to their original places and sweeping up the parrots' messes. If Tropical Storm Fay had been a hurricane, Kay said she would have boarded up the windows and had an employee remain in the store for the duration of the storm. But Fay was a relatively "small storm."

"I was able to stay on top of it," she said. "The birds, they were fine; it was just another day to them."