

Emergency Preparedness and Travel for Pet Bird Owners

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Be Prepared for an Emergency Before it Occurs!

- ❖ Have a travel carrier that is appropriate in size and material for your species of bird.
 - NEVER take your bird outside unless she is in a carrier! Even birds that are clipped can still achieve great distance, even though they cannot achieve height. Birds spook easily and sometimes for reasons that aren't apparent; a spooked bird's first instinct is to fly and if she makes it over to a tree or a tall structure.....up she goes! Because they are brightly colored, parrots are easy targets for hungry hawks, especially if your bird is small.
 - Your bird's travel carrier should contain a perch and should be just big enough for your bird to perch in a normal upright position without his head touching the top of the carrier or his tail touching the bottom of the carrier. He should be able to move back and forth a few inches side to side on his perch and should be able to easily turn around.
 - The perches in most carriers are made of dowel rods, which are not good for your bird's feet. You can solve this by wrapping the perch in vetwrap or coflex bandaging. You can ask your avian vet for this product or buy it online. (Amazon.com for example)
 - The carrier should be made of a material that is sturdy enough to prevent your bird from chewing her way out.
 - Carrier should be equipped to securely hold a food and water bowl (or water bottle). Water bottles are ideal for travel to avoid splashing and spills, as long as your bird knows how to use a bottle. Train your bird to drink from a bottle before it is time to travel. You can also provide pieces of your bird's favorite fruit to supply some water.
 - Provide your bird with toys to play with in her carrier, but make sure any hanging toys are positioned against the wall of the carrier so that they do not swing around and hit your bird should the ride get bumpy.
 - Each bird in your flock should travel in a separate carrier, with the exception of bonded cockatiels and budgies. Even birds that are friends will snap at each other if one bird spooks, and you don't want anyone to lose part of their beak or a toe. This scenario happens all too often.
 - Keep the carrier near your bird's cage so that you can find it easily should you and your bird need to quickly evacuate the house during an emergency, such as a house fire.
 - If your bird is scared of his travel carrier, you will need to gradually teach him to view the carrier as a fun place. When your bird is out of his cage playing, put some of his favorite toys and treats in the carrier and position it where he can crawl in and out of it at will. This process may take time and patience. Always leave the carrier where he can see it from his cage so that the carrier becomes a familiar object to him.
 - Take your bird for short rides to fun destinations (not just to the vet) so that she will become comfortable with her carrier and riding in a car. For example, go visit friends and family, take a trip to the pet store or visit a park. Many birds grow to love riding in cars.
- ❖ Have a plan for how you and your family will deal with various types of emergencies and make sure each member of the family knows the plan.
 - Plan how each member of the family will respond in the event of a fire, flood or tornado and include details about who will secure your bird and where all members of the household will meet up. For example, what part of your house will be the safest place for your family and pets during a tornado? Plan your response and have the whole family practice putting this plan into action
 - If you have a bird that is not tame, it may be difficult to quickly retrieve your bird from her cage during an emergency. If possible, teach your bird to step up onto your hand on command. An avian veterinarian or behavior specialist can help you with this task. For

untamed birds, keep a net or an appropriately sized towel near their cage and occasionally practice retrieving your bird.

- ❖ Be able to recognize when your bird is sick, anxious or stressed and be prepared to respond appropriately.
 - Traveling and staying in an unfamiliar place may be stressful to your bird, and stressed birds are more likely to get sick. Birds are very good at hiding signs of illness, making it very important that you learn to recognize subtle signs that your bird may be sick. Otherwise your bird may be sick beyond help before his illness becomes apparent.
 - Birds that are stressed or sick may eat and drink less, however, some illnesses cause birds to drink more and pass more urine.
 - Sick birds will often vocalize less or not at all and may spend all their time in one spot in their cage. A bird that is already very sick will sit on the cage bottom.
 - If your bird is sick she may also appear fluffed up and she may shiver. Feathers around the eyes and nostrils may be damp and you may notice her sneezing.
 - Birds that are sick may be less interested in playing with toys and may show a decreased interest in being handled or spending time out of the cage.
 - If you suspect that your bird is sick, you should call an avian veterinarian immediately. A directory of avian veterinarians listed by state can be found on the Association of Avian Veterinarians website (AAV, <http://www.aav.org/search/>). Print a list of local avian vets located in and around your destination city anytime you travel with your bird. You can also obtain this information by calling your regular avian vet. (As an aside, all birds should see an avian vet annually for a physical exam so that potential illnesses can be identified as early as possible)
 - Bird owners should have a bird emergency kit in their homes and should take this kit with them when traveling with their birds. This kit includes a small "hospital cage", warm blankets, a heating pad and styptic powder. If you suspect that your bird is ill, place him in the "hospital cage," put the heating pad on top of the cage on the lowest setting and contact an avian vet immediately. Your travel carrier is a good "hospital cage". The styptic powder can be used if your bird breaks a blood feather and is losing blood. In such instances you should apply styptic powder to the feather and pinch down on the feather shaft for several minutes to allow the blood to clot. Call an avian vet immediately, as the feather may need to be pulled to prevent more blood loss.
- ❖ Be prepared for power outages, which will make it challenging to keep your bird warm in the winter or cool in the summer.
 - You can keep your bird warm by placing her in a travel carrier and wrapping the carrier in insulated blankets. An insulated arctic sleeping bag would be ideal. Leave a small portion of the cage uncovered so that your bird gets fresh air.
 - If you will be using a fireplace, be certain that the chimney has been cleaned recently and that the flue is open. Otherwise smoke will enter your house and can be very toxic to your bird.
 - Avoid using scented candles, as these are also toxic to birds.
 - Vapors from kerosene heaters are toxic to birds. Do not use them in the same room as your bird, and ideally don't use them at all.
 - If your bird appears cold (shivering and fluffed up) despite your attempts to keep her warm, put your bird in a running car with the heat on until she warms up. Place blankets in the car near the heat vent to warm them up and then wrap them around the travel carrier before removing the bird from the car. (Do this in the driveway, NOT in the garage! Car fumes are deadly to you and your bird!)
 - When you contact the power company to report an outage, let them know that you have a pet bird and that birds are much more sensitive to extreme temperatures than are dogs and cats.

- If your power goes out in the summer months, keep your bird cool using a water bottle for misting or a small battery operated fan. Place a shallow dish of cool water in the bottom of your bird's cage for bathing. Your bird will likely drink more than usual to cool off so keep a careful eye on the water bottle/bowl.

Traveling by Car with Your Bird

- ❖ Allowing your bird to ride in the car outside of a travel carrier is dangerous to you, your passengers and your bird.
 - Birds, with their delicate skeletal structure and small size, are far more likely to be seriously injured in a minor fender bender than are people, dogs and cats. Keeping your bird contained in an appropriately sized carrier reduces this risk to your bird.
 - A loose bird is a potential distraction to the driver, especially if the bird spooks and flies or decides to take a tour of the car.
- ❖ Position the travel carrier securely in your car so that the carrier will not move around, in a spot away from the direct path of air conditioning/heat and away from audio speakers.
 - Position the carrier so that the perch is parallel to the length of the car. (Perching bird faces side windows instead of windshield.) This position allows birds to shift weight to one foot or the other while bracing themselves against acceleration and braking.
 - Carriers should always be securely fastened in the back seat unless your front passenger seat does not have an airbag or the airbag function can be turned off.
 - To reduce your bird's anxiety, position the carrier so that he can easily see and hear you.
- ❖ Make sure your bird is kept at a comfortable ambient temperature, somewhere between 65 and 80 degrees.
 - Keep temperature considerations in mind when making rest stops along the way. A car can become very hot in summer months or too cold in winter months once the ignition is turned off. If you must leave your bird alone in the car for a short period of time, be sure to crack windows in hot months or cover the travel carrier with a warm blanket in cold months.
 - Turn air vents away from your bird's direct path so that heat or air conditioning does not blow directly on your bird.
 - Observe your bird for signs that she may be too warm or too cold. A cold bird will fluff her feathers up and shiver, while a bird that is too warm will slick her feathers back, hold her wings out from her body and may breath out her mouth.
- ❖ Be conscientious of your bird's emotional state and try to minimize any stress and anxiety.
 - Your bird may or may not appreciate some good music, but most birds will prefer that the music in your car is not playing too loud.
 - The noise and wind created by a cracked window may stress your bird.
 - Some birds may become anxious watching the scenery whizzing by out the window. You can try covering the carrier with a blanket or towel. Other birds prefer being able to see what is going on around them and may be anxious under a blanket. It is common for birds to become car sick and vomit; if your bird resumes normal eating and drinking once you reach your destination, there is no reason for alarm.
- ❖ Avoid exposing your bird to potential toxins. Birds are highly sensitive to smoke and aerosolized sprays, and exposing them to such toxins within the close confines of a car is especially hazardous.
 - DO NOT smoke while your bird is in the car. Smoke is not only irritating to your bird's extensive and specialized respiratory system but also acts as an irritant to eyes and skin. Smoke predisposes your bird to bacterial infections and behavior problems such as plucking and self-mutilation.
 - Remove hanging air fresheners from your car and avoid using spray air fresheners. If you know that your bird will be traveling with you soon, do not use cleaning products inside your

car (such as Armor All, Windex or fabric cleaner). Instead use Oxyfresh or a vinegar/water solution.

- Avoid using or wearing heavily scented perfumes, cosmetics and beauty products.
- ❖ If you will be traveling across state lines, you will be required to obtain a health certificate from a licensed veterinarian. Some states have border patrols and will ask for this paperwork.

Airline Travel with your Bird

- ❖ Contact your airline as soon as you know your plans for travel to find out their policies and extra fees for birds.
 - Most airlines have restrictions on carrier sizes and these restrictions vary from one company to the next. You will most likely need to use a cat or dog crate to carry your bird. If there is enough room inside the carrier for you to attach a perch and still leave your bird enough head and tail room, your bird would be more comfortable perching.
 - Some airlines will allow your bird to travel as a carry-on in the cabin of the plane as long as the carrier fits under your seat, while other airlines may require that your bird travel in the cargo bay. Some airlines will allow small birds in the cabin but restrict larger birds to the cargo bay. All international flights require that your bird travel in the cargo bay. The pet section of the cargo bay is climate-controlled, pressurized and contains breathable air.
 - If you will be switching planes to another airline, be sure that you also contact that airline for information on policies and fees.
 - Most birds will eat and drink very little while flying. Try putting some of your bird's favorite food in his carrier to encourage eating. Fruit will supply sugars for energy and some water.
- ❖ Make sure that your bird has clear identification and that you have all paperwork required for travel.
 - Have your avian veterinarian implant an identification microchip in your bird (recommended) and/or put an identifying leg band on your bird so that you can find her in the unfortunate event that she becomes lost.
 - Clearly identify your bird by putting tags on her travel carrier that show her name, her species, your name and your contact information. Be sure to include contact information for your destination.
 - If possible secure the travel carrier with a padlock. Locking the carrier will prevent your bird from escaping and will prevent curious staff and passerby from opening the carrier door.
 - In order for your bird to fly on a plane, you will need to obtain a health certificate from an accredited vet no more than 10 days before your flight.
 - For international travel you will need the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service form 7001 signed by an accredited vet and the appropriate U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) official in your city (<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/travel/pets.html>). You will also need a CITES permit (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, <http://www.cites.org/>). Obtaining all the necessary paperwork will take **at least 3** weeks and potentially several months so plan accordingly. You will need this paperwork on your flight out of and back into the country.
- ❖ Either have an avian vet clip your bird's wings before airline travel or have your bird wear a secure harness in the airport, as you may be asked to remove your bird from her carrier as you pass through security checkpoints.

Living Away from Home Temporarily with Your Bird

- ❖ Many hotels do not allow pets, however, a list of pet-friendly hotels can be found at the following websites:

- www.travelpets.com
 - www.petswelcome.com
 - www.pettravelcenter.com
 - http://hotels.uptake.com/united_states/pet_friendly.html
- ❖ If you will be staying in a different state, be sure that you know the laws regarding pet birds. Some states and certain cities have legally banned certain species of parrots and have legal right to confiscate your bird, euthanize him/her, penalize you with a fine or all of the above. For example, Quaker parrots have been banned in California, New Jersey and some other states.
 - ❖ Depending on the size of your bird and the size of the carrier, you may want to bring a collapsible cage. If your bird normally uses a play-stand and you have room to pack it, bring it too. If you can't bring a play-stand you can attach perches to the outside of the cage to create a play area; however, allowing your bird to climb on the outside of his cage on a regular basis may lead to behavior problems. Don't forget to pack perches!
 - ❖ Bring plenty of food, treats and toys in case these items are hard to find in the city you are visiting. If you are away from home for an extended period of time, you may need to order these items online.
 - ❖ Keep these tips in mind if you are staying with family and friends:
 - Family and friends will likely need to be educated or reminded about potential hazards to birds, such as open windows and doors, cats and dogs, cigarette smoke, aerosol sprays, burning candles, cleaning products, Teflon coated pans and appliances, etc.
 - Ensure that your bird is safe from pet dogs, cats, ferrets, etc. This may require keeping your bird in a separate room with the door closed. If you do keep your bird in the main area of a house where cats and dogs are present, ensure that the cage is high enough that noses and paws cannot access your bird through the cage bars. A cat's saliva contains bacteria that are highly deadly to birds so cats and birds should never be allowed access to one another, even if they are buddies. Because cats lick their paws and groom themselves constantly, these deadly bacteria are all over a cat's body. Your bird can become infected if he is scratched, bitten or even if your bird preens a cat's fur or vice versa. If you are concerned that your bird may have been in contact with a cat, call an avian vet immediately, as your bird may need antibiotics. Some birds are stressed at the sight of dogs and cats and will need to be housed in a separate room even if the dog/cat is well behaved.
 - Some birds are very uncomfortable around strangers and/or large groups of people and may be more comfortable in a quiet part of the house.
 - ❖ Keep these tips in mind if you are staying in a hotel or motel:
 - Let the front desk know that your bird is staying with you and that cleaning chemicals and sprays are dangerous to your bird and cannot be used in your room. Bring your own cleaning supplies, such as Oxyfresh or a vinegar/water solution. Also leave a note with this information for housekeeping.
 - Consider putting a padlock on your bird's cage to prevent housekeeping from opening the cage door while you are not in the room. Any well-meaning animal lover may be tempted to pet your bird or get him out of his cage.
 - If your bird has a tendency to bite, leave a warning note on the cage to prevent fingers from being bitten.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or comments. tnposton@ncsu.edu

A special **Thank You** to Dr. Greg Burkett for helping me put this handout together!