

**PORTABLE POWER:**  
**Affordable Ways to Beat Mother Nature**  
by PJ Schimel of Hex Aviary  
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This has been the mildest Winter that I can remember in the Northeast. Today is a clear sunny day in March.

Nonetheless, there are gale force winds blowing and we have been without power since early this morning. According to the last automated bulletin from our infamous power company, they have not even dispatched a crew to assess the situation yet. At times like this, I am grateful for names like Onan, Honda and Tripp Lite. These are some of the companies that make affordable temporary solutions to power outages due to the whims of Mother Nature.

Unless they have previously experienced the need for portable power in an emergency, most people don't concern themselves with it. *Every bird owner should consider the eventual need for some type of portable power system.* During a hurricane, a winter storm, a tornado, a flood or a severe windstorm etc, you could lose power in your home. You might even have to evacuate your home on a minute's notice. How would you keep your birds cool in a heat wave and how would you boil safe water without electricity? In a cold climate how would you keep your family and beloved pet birds warm, safe and comfortable? And if you are a breeder, how would you keep your incubators and brooders at the proper temperatures or be able to warm formula?

One solution is a power inverter. A power inverter is a small electrical device which converts DC current, from a car cigarette lighter or a battery, into 110 AC current. This allows you to use a common electrical device or appliance, such as a computer, a brooder, an incubator or a heating pad in your car or anyplace where you have a 12 volt battery.

Power inverters can be purchased in a computer store, like J & R Music World in NYC, or in a recreation vehicle store or in a marine supply store, such as the national E & B Marine chain. The prices and capabilities of the units vary. They start at around \$39, for a 100 watt model and go up to several hundred dollars for a large unit that will provide power for up to 24 hours.

A small capacity power inverter usually has 100 watt capacity. This would enable you to take three normal heating pads (most heating pads use 25 watts), wrap each one in a towel, place it in the bottom of a pet carrier, place newspaper on top of the pad and then place your pet bird inside. You would then wrap the whole carrier in a towel or blanket and place it securely in the car. The pet or multiple pets would be comfortable and warm and you could drive to safety. You would also be able to use a small traveling commuter mug that plugs into a car lighter to boil clean drinking water or to heat hand feeding formula for baby birds still hand feeding. These units cost about \$10 dollars and can be picked up in Macy's, Lechters or any other store that sells household gadgets.

In the event that you lose power in the house and don't need to evacuate, you can buy an accessory for the power inverter, a detachable set of miniature jumper cables for about \$6. This allows you to bypass plugging the power inverter into your car's cigarette lighter and enables you to hook up directly to any 12 volt battery. Voila, you have power. Any 12 volt battery will work. An extra car battery, kept charged and in the garage ready for emergency use, is inexpensive and will work for 6 to 12 hours, depending on what you plug into the inverter and how much electricity that device draws. You can purchase small rechargeable electric batteries that will last for 6 hours a piece. They are compact, about one third the size of a car battery, and really add to the portability of your power inverter. They are more expensive than a car battery, but I find them invaluable. They last for years and are well worth the extra few dollars that they cost. They are around \$80 dollars a piece. Multiple batteries will also extend the length of time that you can provide power and should be considered if you are in areas which experience lengthy outages.

For people who have larger power requirements, a 400 watt power inverter from Tripp Lite, a leader in the power inverter field costs around \$200 dollars. This is hundreds less than a gasoline generator that handles the same electrical capacity.

Since this article is being published and read electronically, I feel safe to assume that some of you have electrical backup systems (UPS) to power down or run your computer in an emergency. This same system, although more expensive, can power a brooder, heating pad, etc. in an emergency. It might keep your pet alive and you and your family comfortable and in touch with the outside world.

A gas powered generator is another option for providing emergency power. Generators run from 200 watts to thousands of watts. They can be purchased in hardware stores, lumber yards, or specialized generator stores. Costs vary from around three hundred dollars for a small gas powered pull start diesel unit to ten thousand dollars for a large self starting generator which switches itself on automatically in the event of a power outage and then switches itself off when the power returns. This is a nice and convenient feature, but not practical for most households.

Don't attempt to use kerosene heaters or scented candles, both of which give off dangerous and potentially fatal fumes. Many pet birds die each year from the good intentions of well meaning, ill prepared people who use scented candles, teflon pans and kerosene heaters to try to help keep themselves, their families and their pets comfortable in a emergency. These people awake to find their birds dead from toxic fume inhalation.

It is getting dark now and the winds have died down. The surrounding houses are almost completely dark, except for the flicker of an occasional candle. We are all warm and well heated here. The generator has been running for about 6 hours. I have to go to check on the gas. My family, human, feathered and furred are all warm and cozy. We will have a hot meal and be comfortable. We were and are prepared.

I hope that all of you are also safe and comfortable. If not, take a moment to consider your options and make an emergency preparedness plan. Call some stores and purchase some portable power before you really need it. This will be a long night for my neighbors, and a long day tomorrow, as the power company says that power will be restored sometime after midnight tomorrow night.

**PJ is the owner of HEX Aviary, a MAP certified aviary and has been breeding birds for over 16 years. PJ is very interested in the subjects of avian microbiology, testing and diseases and has written a number of articles on these topics. Copyright © 1997 PJ Schimel. Email: PJ@hexaviary.com Website: <http://www.hexaviary.com>**