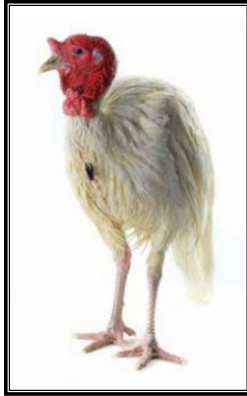


HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #59



EL NIÑO WEATHER WATCH

Part 4: Turkey Talk About Fowl-Weather Floods And Animal Survival

By Wanda Sue Parrott

(Weather forecasts predict the Monterey Peninsula will be hard hit by El Niño conditions this winter, with potential flooding and frigid temperatures that could be deadly for unsheltered persons. What is being done to provide shelter and service if dire predictions materialize? This series explores foul-weather aid for everyone.)

Take Pets Or Leave Them Behind?

A **POTENTIAL EL NIÑO** weather disaster that could separate you and your animals is defined as an “Act of God” and includes windstorms/hurricanes/tornados, explosions, earthquakes, fires, and floods as tiny as trickles in street-gutter streams to overflowing banks of the Salinas and Carmel rivers.

Survival depends on the speed with which a flood moves and how rapidly you get out of its way. When making contingency plans about how to survive a flood, include all animals whose lives depend on you. A parakeet in a cage would fit in a car. A pony would not.

So, since this is the Thanksgiving week, turkey talk is metaphoric for “fowl-weather” floods.

The Slow Flood

The wet, white-feathered turkey represents the less-threatening flood that gradually forms as rain falls slowly and steadily, saturating the ground, over periods of time until creek beds fill and rivers spill.

Slow flooding gives you time to take precautions to protect yourself and/or your property by plotting a course such as putting down sandbags, setting up sump pumps, or relocating living quarters or campsite location if you are houseless.

Homemade Flashflood Sandbags

Sandbags, which are costly, heavy and hard to move, can be commercially purchased, but lightweight transportable “sandbags” can be made easily by stuffing 10- or 20-gallon trash bags with towels or wadded-up newspaper, then securely tying them shut. They can later be opened and recycled.

They block water that is encroaching under doorways if placed on the outside of the door, with the loose side of the plastic bag pulled indoors across the jamb/ threshold so it is held tightly in place when the door is closed. I learned to make such sandbag-seals from my mother, a seasoned Ozarks Mountain flash-flood survivor.



The Flash Flood

This bright wet rooster, like the legendary mad wet hen, represents a powerful force of nature with which to be reckoned right on the spot.

The fast flood, or flash flood, is a river of moving water that can form in minutes and vanish just as quickly. It can hit unexpectedly and force you and other living things into a fight-or-flight position in which lives depend on which is swifter: the current or those trying to escape.

Would you leave animals behind in order to save yourself? It's a hard question.

Similarities Of Floods

At their crest—or peak—both slow and fast floods can look alike. For example, in this photo outside my home in Springfield, Missouri, filthy stormwater-sewage soaks my knees after one of the annual floods I endured from 2000 to 2009.

The sky proves this was a flash flood because it cleared as the storm passed overhead like a Spanish galleon under full sail, leaving in its wake a clear sunny sky that made the deadly swill-filled water look like clean, clear mirror glass.

Conversely, slow floods are often called “gray” because they resemble atmospheric opacity.

Driving Through A Flooded Street

Never deliberately drive into a flooded familiar intersection, but if your vehicle is trapped as you cross a water-filled street, this tip that worked for me might help you: Continue driving forward at around 5 miles per hour without turning around, pumping pedals, or gunning your motor. Even if water comes in through the floorboards, crawl forward instead of racing the engine and dousing the spark that fires your motor.

If a flooded road is unfamiliar to you, do not enter; it might deeper than it appears, and vehicles can become buoyant like kayaks in fast-flowing floods that sweep them downstream.

Victims Of The Flooding

Ten minutes after my flood photo was snapped by a neighbor, our street was empty of water, but the effects of that fast-moving flood were fatal and lingered a year because crickets, cicadas and frogs that previously serenaded on summer evenings were drowned. Other victims of the storm were gophers, field mice, rabbits, ground squirrels, skunks, raccoons, slugs, snails, rats, and possums. A batch of feral kittens under the house next door drowned, except for one survivor we adopted and nicknamed “Orphan of The Storm.”

Flat silence isn't gobbledegook. It's a haunting reminder we, as stewards of the earth, are as gods whose acts shape the fate of other life forms for which we are responsible. It's not easy being human at such times.

My neighbor Jim was at work when his beloved old dog was trapped shoulder-deep in flash flood water in their backyard. She developed pneumonia and was euthanized a week later.



The only rain that day fell from Jim's eyes. "I shouldn't have left her outdoors," he said. "I knew rain was predicted. I didn't know it would flood."

Friends in rural areas outside town, who fled farmland flooding, lost livestock they left in pastures and fields.

If you aren't present when a flood hits your animals, what would they do? An indoor cat would climb as high as possible onto a closet shelf or piece of furniture. If outdoors, it would probably climb a tree or perch on a roof.

Where would your ground-bound dog go? Would its doghouse serve as a makeshift Noah's Ark like the floating craft on a 1974 Vatican postage stamp?

Fortunately, help is close at hand. According to the website of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA):



"The SPCA for Monterey County was the very first animal welfare agency in the United States to partner with the American Red Cross and shelter pets adjacent to human evacuation shelters during disasters.

"We continue that commitment today with concrete partnerships with our local Red Cross and a seat at the Office of Emergency Services."

If you have questions or need assistance with emergency pet or livestock evacuations during disasters, contact the SPCA at 1002 Monterey-Salinas Highway, Salinas, CA 93908, or call 831-373-2631.

Or, for an inspiring slice of metaphorical pumpkin pie, visit their website at www.spcamc.org.



Coming next week: the City of Monterey's emergency preparedness plans.

Happy Thanksgiving!

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