



Being Prepared

By: Val Betts

The increasing number of seriously and sometimes fatally wounded and injured gliders coming into rescues is a sad sign of the number of unprepared and uneducated owners living among us. Some think it will never happen to them. Others have been deceived into believing that their gliders do not require or deserve proper veterinary care through the teaching of mill breeders and brokers. Others are just unaware that help and information are available.

With advances in glider knowledge/research and in veterinary care for exotic species, there are very few things that a glider cannot recover from if given immediate and appropriate care. This is a guide to help you GET prepared for an emergency and STAY prepared.

FINANCIAL PREPARATION

It has been said a 100 times that it is necessary to have an emergency vet fund. Emergency care is NOT cheap, but it IS necessary. A recommended amount for an emergency fund is \$500. Many times, emergency bills exceed of \$1000 or more. This fund should be secured such that you have access to it 24/7 and ONLY access it for vet care.

Other options for ensuring that you are financially prepared for an emergency are Care Credit (www.carecredit.com) and/or a credit card used solely for veterinary expenses. Care credit offers affordable payment plans, in many instances with no interest. IF you choose to use credit as your primary veterinary fund, you MUST have this credit card/plan in your hands before an emergency - like TODAY.

You might also consider veterinary pet insurance. VPI pet insurance (www.petinsurance.com) offers policies that provides coverage for sugar gliders for self-mutilation, hospitalization due to accident, prescriptions and x-rays at a cost of about \$10 per month.

Regardless of which method you choose for staying ready, finances should be in place before the glider is brought into your home.

VETERINARY PREPARATION

In order to be prepared for ANY emergency, you must be sure to have:

- 1) A regular vet who is experienced with sugar gliders. This vet's phone number should be very easily accessible to you in many locations (i.e. near the kitchen phone, in the glider room, in your purse, in your emergency notebook).
- 2) A back up vet who is experienced with sugar gliders. This vet's phone number should also be easily accessible for emergency situations.
- 3) A 24-hour emergency vet number. This is **ESSENTIAL**, as many emergencies with gliders are noticed or occur during the night, when they are active. A 24-hour vet may not have as much experience with gliders as other vets, but should be willing to consult with your regular vet or another of the regular vets willing to do consultations. Try to find a 24-hour vet who has experience with sugar gliders.
- 4) The phone numbers of several vets willing to do consultations on more difficult or unusual issues - or even your vet's first experience with a certain issue. Dr. Bradley Walsh (918-258-0040) is a vet that is willing to consult with **OTHER VETS** (it must be a vet who calls them).

Veterinary intervention in an emergency situation is not optional. Have a good working relationship with your vet and make sure that your vet has seen all of your gliders at **LEAST** once - this gives the vet a healthy baseline upon which to base test results and behavioral changes. **DO NOT** wait until an emergency to introduce yourself and your gliders to your vet.

TRANSPORTATION PREPARATION

In order to access immediate and appropriate veterinary care in an emergency, you **MUST** have reliable and consistent transportation and be a licensed driver. If you are not licensed to drive yourself to the vet, you might reconsider owning an exotic animal. If you share one family car and are left home alone without a car, then you must find another option for transportation or reconsider owning gliders. Perhaps you can use some of your emergency fund to call a cab or to offer a friend some money for gas if they will rush you to the vet.

If using a cab service, have the number readily available and posted in your home near the phone.

If relying on a friend, make sure you have a back up friend or family member ready to go at a moment's notice 24/7 - and do not forget to make special arrangements for when that friend or family member takes a vacation, gets sick, or has other obligations.

Really, if you are going to rely on someone else to get you to the vet, they need to be someone that you are in contact with several times a day, can get in touch with any time of day, and who is willing to keep you informed of their daily schedule.

If using your own car - be sure to keep gas in the car, the oil changed and other regular maintenance done in a timely manner.

HOME & EMERGENCY KIT PREPARATION

You need to have a few things in your home ready for use in an emergency situation.

1) You **NEED** to have an e-collar on hand - at **LEAST** one - if you have gliders in the house. E-collars need to be fitted for the glider to ensure that they will fit snugly. This needs to be repeated any time your glider loses or gains a significant amount of weight. This will also give you practice in putting the e-collar on. It is much more difficult to learn how to fit and secure an e-collar while in the midst of an emergency. E-collars should be kept in an easily accessible spot in the house. Make sure that any glider sitter or other caregiver knows right where they are located **AND** how to put one on.

Pre-made e-collars with snaps, which are adjustable in size and easily put on by one person, are available at the store on **THE GLIDER INITIATIVE's** website - <http://www.thegliderinitiative.org>

2) You need to have a scale that measures in **GRAMS**. Gliders should be weighed a **MINIMUM** of once monthly, and any time that illness is suspected. Often, the first - or only - sign that your glider is experiencing an illness is weight loss. Given the small size of gliders, you cannot just "look at them" and determine weight loss. Even a small weight loss can be significant. A scale for weighing your gliders is another necessary item.

3) You need to have a hospital/isolation cage. This is not just another regular size cage. A hospital cage should be small in order to limit a glider's movement. Usually, we say more space is best for a glider. However, when ill, they need to confine their movement/energy use so that they can heal. I use a very small 18x14x18 inch birdcage as a hospital cage. Once the "worst" has passed, I move the glider to either a 38-gallon reptarium laid on its side or a 20x18x18 inch cage. Whatever you choose to use as a hospital cage, it needs to be empty (not used to house other gliders), clean and accessible for use at a moment's notice.

IF your glider is very ill, it might need an incubator type of isolation cage. Some ill or injured gliders have a very difficult time regulating their body temperature. Therefore, a small plastic or glass incubator is necessary. Be sure there is adequate ventilation at all times and keep the incubator covered in fleece. Many use a plastic kitter keeper or a 5-gallon glass aquarium. Line the incubator with plenty of fleece for burrowing in. Again, you should have this on hand **IN CASE** you need it.

4) A carrier. You need to have a safe and appropriate carrier for carrying your glider to the vet in an emergency or evacuating in an emergency. Many use small animal carriers such as Screen play purses from THE PAMPERED GLIDER or dog/cat carriers, etc. EACH of your glider cages should have an evacuation/emergency carrier on/near/under/beside the cage. You do not need to be searching for something to safely transport the glider in when there is an emergency.

5) Emergency Medical kit - there have been many, many threads and lists about items to include in an emergency medical kit, so I am not going to list them here. You MUST have one put together if you have gliders living in your home. Many times, items in this kit will stabilize your glider for the trip to the vet. Your medical kit should be well-stocked and easily accessible at all times. Make sure that glider sitters and other caregivers know where to locate your medical kit and how to use all of the items in it. Be sure to check expiration dates on these items and replace them as necessary.

Pre-made emergency medical kits are available from The Glider Initiative's website (<http://www.thegliderinitiative.org>).

6) Quarantine space - Not only do you need a hospital cage, but gliders who have a contagious illness OR who have a compromised immune system NEED to be quarantined from other gliders - in a SEPARATE room. If you do not have a room without gliders in it right now, rearrange something. Quarantine is very serious and failure to quarantine has lead to death more times than I care to elaborate on.

7) A healthy glider diet - We CANNOT stress enough the importance that diet plays in the recovery of an ill or injured glider. After an emergency is NOT the time to begin a good, balanced diet. Past experience tells us that gliders who have a history of a good and balanced diet recover more quickly and more completely than gliders who have come from situations where their diet was "questionable." If your gliders are not yet on a "proven" diet, get them on one today.

INFORMATION & DOCUMENTATION PREPARATION

Sometimes, even the very best glider vet is going to experience a new situation or a very difficult case. In this situation, one of the best resources you have is the experience and advice of others who have "been there, done that." Therefore:

1) You need to be connected to the glider community through websites such as www.glidercentral.net

Some very experienced and knowledgeable people populate these communities. Use this resource to its fullest.

2) Don't forget to take with you the above-posted number for vets who are willing to consult with other vets. It would benefit you to have this number listed on a card and placed in your wallet.

3) You should have a notebook ready that will outline all of your plans and procedures with your gliders in case of a PERSONAL emergency. Include in this notebook information about the "normal" behavior and appearance of each of your gliders, a weight chart, medical records and any other information that may be helpful to a glider sitter or to you if one of your gliders falls ill.

4) Keep all of your glider's previous vet records in an organized and secure place. This should include information on medication and your glider's reaction to the medications. It is a huge resource for your vet to know what meds you have already had the glider on that they have or have not had any negative reactions. In addition, you do not want your glider to build up a resistance to any medication, so this reminder to your vet about what medications they have recently been on may save some valuable time.

5) Prepare IN WRITING for what will happen to your gliders if something horrible were to happen to YOU, and make sure that friends and family know where that information can be found. This is the best thing you can do to prepare for your glider's care in an uncertain future.

NETWORK PREPARATION

"It takes a village..." - No one should have to experience a glider emergency alone. The advice, support, comfort and love of others in the glider community will make a HUGE difference in YOUR ability to weather the storm in a glider emergency.

You should have a list of glider knowledgeable people that you can call anytime -day or night - for assistance and advice. This should include not only seasoned glider veterans but also people in your local area who can offer support in times of need. This is YOUR support network. Do not be afraid to use it. Do not wait until you have an emergency to begin looking up numbers of people you may call. Make a phone list TODAY - then make copies. Keep these copies anywhere that you might need them when dealing with a glider emergency. Program them into your cell phone.

Attend local glider gatherings and get to know the people in your area. Make some glider friends. You never know when you may need them. Do not just make friends - get PHONE NUMBERS!

TIME PREPARATION

Often times, caring for an ill or injured glider is a very time consuming ordeal. IF you have a job which is not flexible with the hours you can work or with you bringing the glider to work with you (and face it, many of us are in this boat), then make arrangements NOW for how you will manage the intensive care of one of your gliders should it become an issue.

In some cases, you just will not be able to arrange for the type of care a glider needs. While this is unfortunate and most likely very emotionally trying for you, you **NEED** to make arrangements **NOW** for what you will do if you **CANNOT** provide the type of care your glider will need to thrive.

There are a few homes within the glider community who are happy to take in a glider in need of rehabilitation or intensive medical care - any time and for any reason. These homes have proven themselves both willing to care for the gliders and able to give the intensive medical care and time required to nurse a glider back to health. If your situation is such that you will not be able to provide **ALL** that your glider needs in a situation such as this, you might consider making arrangements to have your glider sent to one of these homes for treatment. This is an option that **ALL** glider owners should keep in their mind - God forbid anything happens.

Please be aware that these homes will not return the glider to you unless the glider makes a **FULL AND COMPLETE** recovery. It would be irresponsible to transport a glider back and forth before treatment was complete. Sometimes our babies develop illness or injury that they will battle with for the rest of their lives. If you suspect this is the case with your glider, you should know going into a decision like this that the glider will forever be loved and greatly cared for, but it might not ever be in your possession again.

We hope that serves as a reminder of what we **MUST** have in place **BEFORE** an emergency situation. In most cases, having immediate access to a knowledgeable vet, reliable information, a network of glider friends, a well-stocked emergency kit, reliable and consistent transportation, an e-collar, a safe and appropriate recovery area, glider knowledgeable veterans and adequate finances can mean the difference between life and death for your baby.

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