

Article from "The Mickaboo Bird Rescue Companion"  
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## Featured Volunteer: Diane Wilson

By Lucy Macmillan



One of Mickaboo's strengths is the people behind the scenes who help all of the companion birds needing safe homes. These volunteers are what make Mickaboo work, each contributing in their unique way. Diane Wilson is a volunteer who has been integral in helping our birds and those who adopt them by teaching our Basic Bird Care (BBC) class. Her dedication and commitment to Mickaboo and its birds showed through the conversations I've had with her.

LM: How long have you been a Mickaboo volunteer and what prompted you to join?

DW: I became a Mickaboo volunteer in 2012. I had known about Mickaboo for several years, but decided to become involved with the organization after my gold-capped conure Shamie died in 2011. I was not ready for another companion bird but wanted to do something involving birds. I took the BBC class in San Francisco and eventually

attended a Mickaboo event in the City featuring the Telegraph Hill parrots. I had been following their lives for years and was excited to be able to meet some of them. When members of Mickaboo found out that I had a teaching background, I was immediately recruited to teach the BBC Class in San Francisco, which was losing its instructor the next month.

LM: What is your favorite thing about teaching the BBC and how long have you been doing this?

DW: I think my favorite thing about teaching the class is the opportunity to educate people about the nature of parrots. I try to get my audiences to look at the world through the eyes of a parrot—for example, to get a better understanding of what it must be like to be a prey animal, always on alert to avoid being somebody's lunch! I make a point of stressing that parrots are genetically wild animals, and that we need to adapt to their needs as much as possible when they're in captivity. I've been teaching now for about three years—we have classes once a month in San Francisco.

LM: What species of birds are your favorites and why? What kind of birds do you have at home?

DW: First a little background—as a very young child, I was very attracted to birds of all kinds. While other girls had a favorite doll, I had a stuffed toy duck named Quackety. I also remember early mornings before my parents got up, where I would arrange the sheets and blankets in a circle on the bed and play "mommy bird and baby bird" with my younger sister. I had lots of books on birds, went birdwatching and even helped raise a couple of orphaned bluejays to adulthood and freedom.

My first companion bird was a little blue budgie that I named Bluebell because of the bell-shaped markings on either side of his face. After that, throughout most of my life, I was rarely without at least one budgie! By the late 1980's I had started subscribing to companion parrot magazines and online bulletin boards, including one sponsored by Sally Blanchard, who was very active in teaching seminars, writing articles and doing consultations on parrot behavior. In 1990, I had decided, after doing some research, that I wanted a conure, so I went to a local pet store (this was pre-Mickaboo) and was selected by a 4-

month-old gold-capped conure who jumped out of her enclosure, grabbed my bracelet and ran up my arm to my shoulder, where she buried her head in my hair and refused to leave. Needless to say, she went home with me that day, and she was my companion and the love of my life for over 20 years until she died in 2011.

I don't have any birds at this time (for several reasons including ongoing renovations on our 100-year-old house), so I substitute Mickaboo activities and get my "feather fixes" where and when I can. I don't really have a strong favorite bird species—I have a soft spot for just about anything that has (or used to have) feathers!

LM: What do you hope to accomplish as a teacher and what do you hope to see Mickaboo accomplish over the coming year?

DW: First of all, I would like to see us reach more people, regardless of whether or not they eventually become Mickaboo adopters or volunteers. Listing our classes on Facebook is certainly a step in the right direction.

Secondly, I would like to see us expand our educational program to provide follow-up information on specific topics over and above the articles we list on our website. For example, we might have an easy-to-read pamphlet (either hard copy or downloadable) on diet, or training, or lighting, or many other topics. It would also be great to have something fun but informative for children to read, especially those who attend class with their parents or come to adoption fairs and other events.

LM: Any other thoughts you like to share as a volunteer?

DW: Teaching is now only a small part of my volunteer work for Mickaboo. About a year after I started teaching, I joined the Conure Team and then became the Conure Coordinator at the end of 2013. I have learned A LOT about how Mickaboo operates from being on a species team, and that experience has been extremely helpful in the classroom.

