

Figgy, The Green Crow

By Shauna Hill



Photo courtesy of Josh Bridwell at SoCal Parrot

[Editor's Note: This article was written by one of Figgy's rescuers.]

Imagine this scene: in the sky you see a majestic amazon parrot flying overhead. Its beautiful iridescent green body and wings with vibrant shades of red, blue and yellow shine in the sunlight. The call of that parrot is loud and vibrates through you as it's intended to cover large areas so that the flock can keep in contact with each other. It can be a breathtaking sight!

But wait...this is an urban city, not a very good neighborhood, and definitely not a forest that would be this bird's native habitat. He's also alone and trying to follow the local crows to find food and a place to sleep. This was the situation encountered with a lilac crowned amazon, who was flying around a neighborhood near me. Our lost and found coordinator saw a posting asking for help as this bird was frequenting the backyard of a lady named Sunday Tirio. When she saw him she knew he was not a native bird. She had been seeing him for about three weeks before she had even heard about Mickaboo. Mickaboo helps not only the birds surrendered to us but also reaches out to our local communities to help when someone loses or spots a loose parrot.

Since she lived close by me I decided to go over and see what I could do to help. Sunday was concerned about the bird because he just would cry out, and she knew he did not belong out there all alone. Mind you, I have never caught a loose parrot before and had no experience with doing so. I had only heard about others who had been able to do this using various methods. On October 28, I went to Sunday's home to see what kind of bird she was seeing. Our initial description was green with red around the eyes and larger than a crow. Hmm...could this be a military macaw, an amazon parrot, an Eclectus?? I took my red crowned parrot, Bahama, and showed Bahama to Sunday to see if this was the type of bird she was seeing...she didn't think it was, so I was back to wondering just what kind of bird this was.

On the first morning I took Bahama in his carrier into Sunday's backyard and placed it on her patio table along with a bowl of parrot food. I figured this bird might recognize a food bowl and come down to eat if it was really hungry. He was a no show that day and the next day...score: bird 2, me 0. On the third day I came in the morning and waited. I didn't see him. I was off work that day so I ran an errand and came back and waited again – the waiting paid off. Suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of an amazon crying out. I saw a quick flash of his green body and then in an instant he disappeared again. I knew for sure this was an amazon parrot; I just didn't know what kind. In talking to her neighbor I was under the impression this might be a white front amazon because they had one of their own and said it looked like theirs. I thought ok, now we're making progress. The neighbors agreed to let me borrow their bird, Coco, in a cage and bring it to Sunday's back yard to see if their bird might lure the loose one down. By this time I had arranged with one of our volunteers, Katie Wunderlich, to get a cage that we could use to trap him with food inside. I placed this cage on the table along with the neighbor's bird and waited.

He didn't show up. After a while I took Coco back to the neighbor and left downhearted and trying to come up with some other kind of strategy. I had just walked through the door of my home and set my purse and keys down when my cellphone rang. He was back and in the tree in the school yard across from Sunday's house!!! I jumped back in my car and sure enough there was Sunday and neighbors gathered around the fig tree in which he was sitting. I quickly grabbed the food bowl from the backyard. I pretended to eat from it and made "yum yum" sounds. The neighbor's amazon even chowed down on some. The loose Amazon looked intrigued and you could tell he wanted that food but was just too scared to come down close to us to get it. I tried to leave the bowl on the ground and walk away to see if he would come down but he did not. Eventually he had enough of all of us and flew off. At least I got to get a good look at him and could confirm he was not a white front but a gorgeous lilac crowned amazon. We later affectionately named him Figgy, our green crow.



Figgy hiding in his favorite fig tree.



Figgy (on the wire to the left of the two doves) one evening before he went to eat. The squirrel on the corner of the roof would sometimes beat him to the feeder, which made Figgy really mad!

I could tell it was going to be difficult to help Figgy as he was very leery of people. A fully-flighted parrot is not going to just let you catch it unless it has had a strong bond to humans or is injured or desperate enough for food. I had to get help from more experienced folks who had captured loose birds before. He was in danger for the following reasons:

- 1) starvation when food /water sources became harder to find,
- 2) attack by predators (both animal and human...again this was not a good neighborhood and people might try to harm him),
- 3) the lack of a flock to join for safety.

I created a flyer asking people to contact us if they saw him so we could get a better idea of where he was hanging out. That led to some calls but not enough specific information being left and rarely any call back numbers.

Figgy's plight sadly is one Mickaboo hears all too often. People often think a wing trim alone will keep their companion parrot from flying away and are quite surprised when something scares the bird and off it goes. Or a house door left open or cage left outside creates an open invitation for the bird to get away. Others think if they don't want their bird any longer they can just open the door to let it go and it will be just fine on its own. More often than not these birds are disoriented from having to navigate an area they have not previously seen and they either become injured or are killed by a predator. (There are many falcons/hawks/cats/dogs and other animals that would easily grab a weary /starving bird who lands on the ground not realizing the danger.)

On November 3 I was told there was another parrot, an Indian Ringneck, that had been following Figgy for a few days. We saw him off and on but never consistently. One morning as I watched him a falcon landed on the wires overhead. The little bird escaped that time but we don't know when or if he will return. (On March 13, Sunday's neighbor told her they had seen him again but he is not consistently coming around so he's hard to track.) I wonder if someone lets him out and he returns to his cage after his morning flights. We saw him after the bad storm mentioned earlier and he did not have a feather out of place so it appears he's not really spending all his time outdoors.

I contacted Katie Slider, a Mickaboo volunteer who had been on several successful rescue missions in circumstances like this one. She came from the South Bay countless times to help assess matters. Other volunteers like Robert Allen and

Maria Couragee answered the call for help when we tried various techniques to try to bring Figgy out of the cold. It broke your heart to see him up on the wires all alone and calling out. He followed the crows but at a distance and at times they would leave him behind. He tried to cozy up to the doves that were sitting bunched all together for warmth but they moved away from him when he got close and he cried out again. At time his calls would get weak and we knew he was not getting enough food. He would go missing a few days and we always worried that he would not return. And it was getting very cold!!! There was a bad storm and we were all fearful this might have been more than Figgy could survive. We later received a call leading us to where he had rode out the storm in a very kind man's backyard with good cover. We thought maybe this was where Figgy went at night but he never settled in there at dusk and when the persimmons were gone so was he. In fact, the figs in the tree that he had favored were gone too; all the fruits pretty much disappeared as winter went on.

One day after we had hung a huge feed tray loaded with goodies, Sunday saw Figgy get onto the feeder and chow down. It was the break we had been waiting for. We then set up a webcam and moved a table and cage closer to the tree he seemed to favor so he would have easy access to the food inside and on the cage. He then started a fairly regular foraging pattern that we could follow. It took a lot of food to keep the feeders full so some kind Mickaboo folks (Louisa, Mary, and Jessica) sent food and money to help feed him. We also had generous food donations from Pet Food Express to help keep him sustained. He ate eagerly now since the fruit trees were bare.

It was a very slow process and one of the longest rescue efforts Mickaboo has seen but this bird was going to come in at his own speed. We were not going to rush him. He would take a lot of time every morning vocalizing and walking on the fence and climbing the branches of the tree before getting onto the feeder to eat. He had a strong survival instinct and getting onto that feeder/cage was just not something he would do lightly. We would have nice breaks in the cold weather with warm days and Figgy was becoming more vocal and active (his hormone levels might have gone up with the warmer weather). The Figgy-cam Katie had set up showed him from time to time getting on the cage door and top but never climbing all the way in.



This photo was on January 1, 2014. Figgy is in the center of the tree. After the fireworks the prior evening and a stressful morning he stayed in this tree most of the day, something we had not seen him do before. He must have been exhausted.

I remembered one day the East Bay Animal Shelter had a resident amazon. I contacted the shelter manager and asked them to bring their lilac crowned amazon, Bird, to see if Figgy would show an interest in her and come closer. By this time we had also brought in a full-sized cage and left it open with food inside it. (Huge thanks to Vinny Hrovat for lugging that cage all the way from Antioch!) Vinny also left a heating pad you could pop in the microwave and set on top of the cage for Figgy to warm up, but since Figgy was becoming agitated about his food being moved around it was thought best to not try more new elements at that time. Figgy really became boisterous that Saturday afternoon and was calling out very loudly but not coming close. I had also moved the feeder into the larger cage - he did not appreciate that change at all! I worried that he would get frustrated and move on so we made adjustments to the food location and left the small cage on the table with a string attached to the door. Problem with this cage though was getting the door to close properly. With the help of a 99-cent little spring the door would now close on its own after letting go of the string. We were prepared for the day he might venture all the way into the cage.

On January 26, the efforts paid off. The feeding table had a dark table cloth on it, concealing Katie S and me. We were under the table watching the live Figgy-cam feed. Figgy was especially vocal this morning and on edge, wanting the food but not at ease enough to get it.

I think Figgy knew we were there. Nevertheless, after much protesting he climbed into the cage. We pulled the door closed and stared at each other wondering...was he in there???? It was so quiet we were not sure so we just waited. We then heard him move so we knew he was inside the cage. We came out and got close to the elusive Figgy for the first time. He was not sure what was happening so he was understandably not thrilled about it. We covered the cage and he settled down for his journey to his foster home with Katie.

A visit to one of our awesome avian veterinarians, Dr. Chris Sanders, and registered vet tech and fellow Mickaboo volunteer Louisa Jaskulski revealed that although he might have had a minor infection and he was plucking, he was otherwise in good health. The band that he wore was thought to be one that wild-caught birds were issued when they came into this country, so he is most likely a wild caught amazon that could be 23 years old.

During the time he spent at his foster home it became apparent Figgy had been on his own for so long, he no longer had any desire to have human interaction.

We gave Figgy time to see if after he had experienced love and patience if he might start warming up to being in a human home again. He did not. We needed to determine what the best living situation for Figgy would be. The answer, although not an easy one, became clear. Figgy would do much better in a sanctuary situation with fellow amazons to interact with. It then became a matter of which sanctuary would take him. Most are filled to capacity so although a sanctuary was the best place for him, the further challenge was finding one.

You've probably heard the saying "it takes a village". This was certainly true in Figgy's case. Many outside of Mickaboo were touched by Figgy's story and were following it closely. One of those followers was Connie Vasquez. She and Katie were referred to a Southern California sanctuary, SoCal Parrots. This sanctuary educates the public about naturalized parrot rehabilitation and release (where appropriate) into existing wild flocks. There are many local laws/ordinances that do not now permit release but SoCal Parrots is meeting with and presenting data to local officials to change this situation.

After hearing about Figgy, SoCal Parrots agreed to take him! SoCal Parrots features a live feed of their aviary and after Katie played it for Figgy he flew to her laptop and wanted to find the amazons he was hearing...we took that as a "yes"



Team Figgy arrives with the newest addition to the flock!

from him. On March 8, Figgy journeyed with his loyal supporters (Katie Slider, Sunday Tirio, Connie Vasquez, and me) to SoCal Parrots. After a tiring trip, we arrived with Figgy. We were awed by the beautiful sanctuary. Its aviary is over 50 feet long and the design of it was incredible. We let Figgy rest in a bigger carrier to take in the sounds of the other amazons and took a grand tour of the sanctuary. The sanctuary is home to not only parrots but a duck, geese, goats, koi, and turtles. We also met the ambassador birds who live at the sanctuary and travel to shows and classrooms to educate people about SoCal Parrots and the wild flocks of Southern California.

It was then time to let Figgy join the other amazons. Our hearts raced and we all held our breaths. The SoCal Parrots folks knew their flock well and were confident that Figgy would be accepted. Katie got the privilege to take his carrier to the release spot and open it. She reassured him and in an instant Figgy leaped out to find a spot in the aviary. The other amazons watched and just seemed to say "oh, new guy's here" and went about chattering amongst themselves while Figgy took in his new surroundings. After a while the dominant male came to welcome Figgy. Figgy was still letting it all sink in though, so he just moved to a different area. The other bird did not push the issue and continued later to extend the olive branch.

The Figgy team breathed a collective sigh of relief. We continued to watch him. Eventually it was time to eat and the flock showed Figgy where the food was. Before we left he was eating and fluffing to show he was settled in and didn't even look back at us. We came back the next day to find Figgy had made himself quite at home and was even hamming it up at his new favorite spot...right in front of the webcam that produces the SoCal Parrot live feed!

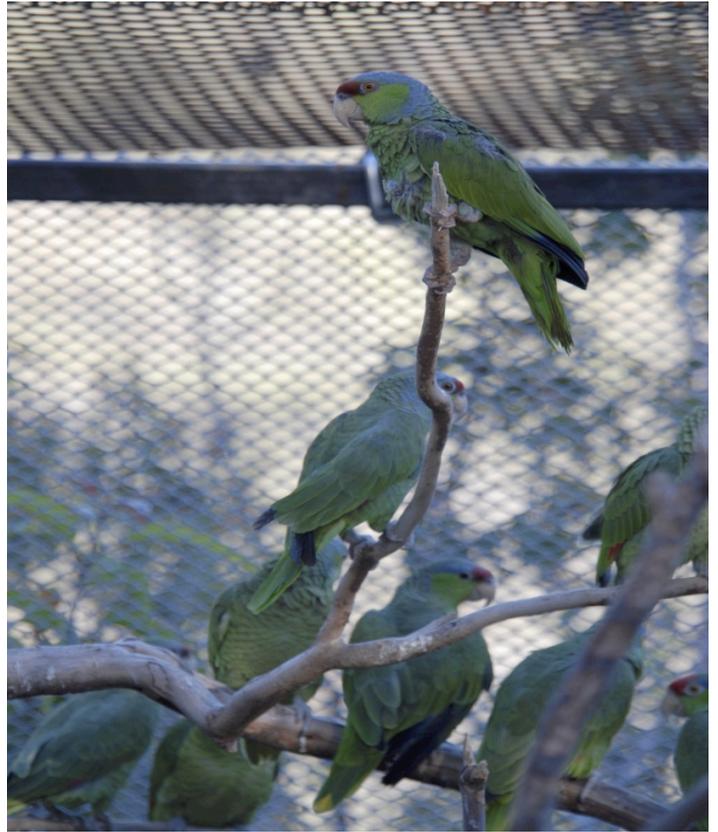
You can tune in and perhaps see our green crow here:
<http://www.ustream.tv/channel/socal-parrot-s-show>

There are many to be thanked for this outstanding outcome and it's almost impossible to name them all.

- My fellow Figgy Team members who saw this adventure through to the end of his journey at SoCal Parrot.
- Mickaboo's CEO, Michelle Yesney, and our Amazon team - Karen Watkins, and Jessica Anderson - who took all of our foster care progress updates into consideration to determine the best place for Figgy.
- Those who provided support by sponsoring Figgy, like Kathie Taylor and Ted Davids, so he could have vet care, and by donating money and food like Mary Miller, Jessica Anderson, and Louisa Jaskulski, and the many others who offered to help Figgy.
- Dr. Chris Sanders and the wonderful Wildwood staff who checked Figgy to ensure he was healthy for the journey to the SoCal Parrot sanctuary.
- The folks at Pet Food Express whose kind donations helped keep Figgy fed.
- The amazing people at SoCal Parrot who took Figgy in and allowed him to join a flock of amazons.

It was truly heartwarming to see the outpouring of support and encouragement by so many, all to help a lonely green bird.

He's not alone anymore.



Figgy (at top) settling in at the SoCal Parrot aviary.
Photo courtesy of Josh Bridwell at SoCal Parrot