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Featured Volunteer: Karen Watkins
By Shauna Hill



Karen & Mananita

AMAZONS, AMAZONS, AMAZONS!!!! It seems appropriate that these feisty, bigger-than-life birds should have just as boisterous of an introduction for their awesome coordinator...Karen Watkins. She loves them and I have to admit they are very special to me too - I have adopted two and fostered many. They are lovable and YouTube is filled with videos of them singing, talking up a storm, and just being the lively characters that they are. Now, not all amazons learn human talk or singing; some use their bird language to communicate very, very loudly - but they certainly do love to be seen and heard. I always think of them as the sports cars of the bird world. Gorgeous to look at and able to shift gears in no time flat. This calls for a human companion who can keep up with that pace. One lady who certainly knows a lot about this, and is an amazon's best friend, is Karen. Let's take a few minutes and get to know her a little more and how she came to be one of their biggest supporters.

SH: Karen, tell us a little about yourself.

KW: I grew up in Michigan and moved to California in my mid-twenties. I married the following year and had a child. She's married now. Retirement from my accounting career started in 2015 just after my granddaughter was born. I provide childcare for her. I also walk dogs and provide pet sitting on the side. My husband and I live with my cat, a Hahn's macaw and two cockatiels.

SH How did you get started with Mickaboo?

KW: I had a cockatiel that I took to Bay Area Bird Hospital. That's where I saw a Mickaboo flyer. I wasn't ready to adopt another bird, so I started fostering in 2007.



Bella, Karen's Hahn's Macaw

SH: You are our Amazon coordinator. How did you get started in that role and are there other volunteer opportunities you have had within the organization?

KW: In 2008, there was an opening for an amazon coordinator. I had fostered 2 amazons but wasn't sure I could do it. Checking in with my friends and Mickaboo volunteers, I realized the tools and support I needed to be successful were there. I became the amazon coordinator that year.

SH: Let's talk about amazons! What would you like people who might be considering adopting one know about these amazing birds?

KW: I love being around amazons. I find macaws a little intimidating, but amazons are just the right size. Their body language is easy to read. They love to talk and sing. Their little eyes are so expressive. They actually smile with their eyes when they're happy.

It's like any other relationship where one has to put some time and energy into it. I've learned to be aware of how I interact with an amazon. They are very sensitive and if I try to rush them through an interaction, I get bitten. I go very slowly when I foster a new bird. I respect the bird's boundaries. That allows us to develop a trusting relationship on the bird's terms. Some birds will never want more than minimal interaction after years of living with me. Others will ask for more attention right away.

It's also important to realize that an amazon has preferences for certain people. I can struggle with a bird who is lunging and stomping around his or her cage. Then another person comes in and the lunging bird calms down, steps up and talks with them. I haven't figured out how that happens, but I respect people who can do that.

SH: You have taken in several amazons over the years. Who are you fostering and how many amazons do we currently have available for adoption?

KW: I'm fostering one cockatiel named Fergus who acts like an amazon. I also have a foster African Grey, Jaspar. He is bonded with Rio the amazon. Then there is Mananita, Rascal, Blue, Gyro, Ike, Charlie, and Leo. There are 43 amazons in foster care at Mickaboo right now.

Smoky, aka Rambo, is the newest amazon to arrive at Mickaboo. He isn't on the Mickaboo website yet because he's under the care of the vets. He's been in the hospital for weeks. He was confiscated by police and brought to a shelter. The shelter staff were talking about euthanasia. Fortunately, a Mickaboo volunteer took him out of the shelter. He has severe bumblefoot (complete with infection), severe arthritis and a dislocation in his ankle. He is a sweet bird who wants to live. I'm very glad Mickaboo can give him a chance at a life with quality.

SH: Thank you Karen for all your hard work to help amazons like Smoky so that they do have that chance. These birds do have a long potential life span (some can live 60-80 years!) and need lots of room for exercise and a healthy diet so they do not become perch potatoes so that should be taken into consideration as well. It's never a dull moment living with an amazon and they can bring many years of enjoyment to your life.



One of Karen's fosters: Leo, an Orange Wing Amazon receiving care for early-stage congestive heart failure.