

## CAG's Prefer Fujis

By Renee Kochevar



"Berry", found in the Berryessa area of  
North San Jose

The following is the incredible, amazing, almost unbelievable true story of the best lunch break I've ever experienced.

I always carry a towel and cardboard animal carrier in the trunk of my car because I never know when I might need them to wrap and crate a scared or injured animal and transport them to a local vet's office. On June 9, 2015, everyone on the Mickaboo Discuss email list received an email from Michelle Yesney [Mickaboo's CEO] saying, "URGENT African Grey Stray Needs Help". As I read the message I saw that the bird's location was just a couple of minutes from where I'm employed, so I decided to go and see if there was any way I could help. As the Mickaboo Parrotlet Coordinator (parrotlet fanatic, actually), I'm a small bird person and am fearful of the large birds and their ENORMOUS beaks. For those unfamiliar with the species, a parrotlet weighs 30 grams (28 g = 1 ounce), and an average African Grey weighs about 15-20 times that much!

On my way to the location of the loose bird (I didn't know until later that it was a Congo African Grey), I called Michelle and asked for tips on what to do. She recommended that if I was going to attempt capture of the bird, to try and offer them some apple as it had worked on luring other loose birds. Since the person who had called in the stray indicated the bird was eating nuts and drinking water from a bird feeder in the back yard, I was hoping he would have an available apple to use as a lure. Michelle also mentioned that in a similar situation in the past, it had taken volunteers three months to trap another similarly large parrot, so we agreed that with my fear of big birds and the potential difficulty of the capture, that I'd go to the house and just assess the situation to see if it made sense for other volunteers to come and assist. On my way to the house I said some fervent prayers hoping that I could actually help in some way and wouldn't end up making the situation worse (e.g., somehow scare the bird and have them fly someplace else). So, figuring "he" might still be hungry, upon arrival at the home with the towel in my hand, I asked the owner for some apple (Fuji), which she quickly produced and cut up into pieces.

Next to assess was the location of the bird. As we walked to the back yard the bird was sitting atop the roof of their patio. The good news was that he was still there and looked happy where he was; the bad news was that the roof was about 8 feet off the ground and built of aging, somewhat warped, unstable boards that were really more of an arbor than a roof. To make matters even worse, the bird was sitting as far away from the edge as possible, up against the wall of the house another 8 feet away. As I stood on the patio under the bird, I thought I'd see if he would respond to me and the apple I had. I raised a slice of the apple, cheerfully saying in what I hoped was an enticing tone, "APPLE!". Not only did the bird reach down and try to take a bite, he just pulled the piece of apple right out of my hand. Although I wasn't expecting that maneuver (small bird person, remember), it was yet another good sign that there was hope to potentially lure him to me if that first slice of apple wasn't enough to ease his hunger.

The homeowner had a nice ladder, which he quickly unfolded (pinching his fingers in the process and I'm sure cursing under his breath – or maybe that's just what I would do) so I could climb up and be at face level with the bird. Not knowing the temperament of this bird, whether he was prone to be aggressive or flighty, I knew that time wasn't on my side but thought that I'd do my best to see if I could at least get the bird within reaching distance since he was so temptingly close and had taken one slice of apple from me already. Once we had positioned the ladder so I could stand and be on the bird's level, the homeowner's son held the ladder for me so I was more stable leaning on the aging boards of the roof. I know from experience with parrotlets that trying to catch them with a towel is a futile endeavor - they're too small and fast. But, if you

somehow surprise them with a towel that is placed optimally when they're stationary, you have a better chance of catching them. I decided to place the towel on the roof where the bird could see it and hopefully not perceive it as a threat, but within grabbing distance should I have an opportunity to use it.

I then held out a second apple piece and said in what I intended to be a cheerful and "come hither" tone, which actually came out as a high-pitched demand an octave higher than I had anticipated, "Come here Baby, APPLE!" As he cocked his head and eyed me, I knew that he recognized what I had in my hand was the "something" he wanted more of. However, he wanted it exactly where he was sitting. No movement whatsoever. Not even a smidgeon. I'm standing there on the ladder wondering if there's anything that will bring the bird closer to me (and afraid that this giant bird would actually come near me and possibly rip my face off), and then the homeowner decided to help me out. She went and got what looked like the handle of a broom, which to my dismay had several rings of what looked like red tape around it at various locations along the entire length of the pole. I immediately thought that a "snake-like-looking-thing" with red rings around it was going to bring my rescue attempt to a premature and very unsatisfying end as I know how much my parrotlets like things that look like snakes. In the presence of anything "snakey," (cords, hoses they can see through the window from inside the house, etc.) they immediately fly fast and far, far away inside the house and hide *somewhere*, not making a peep wherever they might land - behind a dresser, behind the washing machine requiring gymnastic machinations and torqueing of a mature person's body into locations and positions that are not only uncomfortable and awkward, but pretty much impossible to extricate oneself from. The bird always gets out safely - not so much us. But that's what we do for the love of our birds.

Anyway, while the homeowner and son yelled at each other in what I think was Vietnamese *something* (probably, "NO! DON'T DO THAT - HE'LL FLY AWAY!!!" - or maybe that's just what I was thinking would happen), with me atop the ladder hoping all the ruckus and the snake-like-thingy weren't going to send the bird flying away to a place that was appealingly less chaotic, the mother began to poke gently at the bird's derriere with the stick. I don't think at this point I was breathing, and I know that I radiated not only fear but ANXIETY!!!! With the first poke the bird looked down and had an expression like, "*Hey - what the Hell!?*" But then she just bumped the bird again, and I started saying as charmingly as I could squeak out with no air in my lungs, "COME HERE BABY, APPLE!!" while I stuck the slice in his direction. I couldn't believe it! Not only was he not flying away, he started to walk toward me. As the homeowner kept bumping him, he then "got the message," put his head down and panther-like, came walking purposefully toward me. At this point I'm thinking, "Oh my God - he's walking toward me - look at that BEAK!" But, feeling encouraged with the progress, and knowing the way to the nearest emergency room should I need it, I kept trying to lure him with the delicious looking slice of apple until he got within an arm's length and reached out to take a bite.

Now I was in a bit of a pickle. He was biting down firmly on the apple (my last piece - the rest was far away on the ground at the foot of the ladder), but he was too far away for me to make my move and grab him safely. So I pulled a little, and I gently and slowly brought the apple closer. The bird took another step, reached as far as he could and bit down again on the apple, looking right into my eyes as if sensing my agitation at having him so close. He still wasn't as close as I needed him to be. But, sensing I was on borrowed time and my luck was possibly soon to run out, I struck. While he was still attached to the apple in my right hand, I swung my left arm up and over the arbor, pinning him to the awning while I simultaneously let go of the apple, grabbed the towel, and quickly "mushed" him gently but firmly to the "roof" with my left arm and the towel and then wrapped him up and brought him bundled in the towel in a wad to my chest. My heart was pounding in my ears, and I was shaking from the adrenaline running throughout my body at Mach speed. My "lure, trap, wrap and grab" had actually worked!! I couldn't believe my own eyes and arms! Incredible!! Fantastic!! My brain was awash with amazing disbelief at the act that I had actually just pulled off! And without injuring myself from a puncture wound or from falling off the ladder - wow! No injuries AND I caught the bird?! Amazing!

Anyway, with the bird writhing, growling and snarling in my arms, I made my way shakily down the ladder to the smiling faces of the mother and son. I couldn't believe it! Had I really just caught a loose African Grey bird off someone's roof in my work clothes at lunchtime in 10 minutes flat? Incredible!! At the same time the mother was talking to someone on the phone and I heard "Mickaboo," and I asked if I could speak to the person. Mickaboo volunteer Debbie Yoon was on the phone and she offered to foster the Grey that I had just captured. We agreed to meet in 30 minute's time at the Starbuck's about a mile away. As the

homeowners ushered me around the house to my car, it was time to safely transfer the treasure in my arms into the cardboard carrier.

To ensure no ridiculous mishaps occurred resulting in an escaped bird that had just been so recently and inexplicably captured, I extricated him gingerly into my carrier from the towel into which he had sunk his claws while I sat in the back seat of my car with the doors closed. As I gently shook him free of the towel (while my body shook faster than I was shaking the towel), I got him safely inside the box and placed him on the back seat. I got out of the car and thanked the mother and son for their call and assistance, then drove to Starbucks where Debbie met me about half an hour later.

As I waited for Debbie to arrive, I went into Starbucks with my carrier in tow to purchase an iced coffee as my cool reward. The cardboard carrier drew the attention of the barista behind the counter who asked what was in the box. Afraid I might be tossed out for bringing an animal into the establishment, and wanting to share my incredible story with anyone who would listen, I told her briefly what I had done and what exactly was moping inside the box. She said that it was an incredible story, paused, looked me up and down and said, "you rescued the bird *in that* (meaning my work clothes)?" I said yes, I was at work when I received the message and since free birds have a tendency to fly away, there was no time for a wardrobe change in my haste to "get there."

As I sat outside Starbuck's with the bird in the carrier and my drink in my hand pondering the incredible events of the last half hour, I'd sneak peeks into the carrier. When I'd look inside to check on him, the Grey avoided eye contact and turned his back on me. He was not happy that I had 'betrayed' his trust by trapping him so rudely when he had come to me willingly. But I was so grateful that he was safe with me and would hopefully be returned to his family soon that I didn't mind the ungrateful snubs. The bird was obviously in good health and of good weight, and had been taken care of up until recently by someone who cared for him. As Debbie drove away with what she had told me was a Congo African Grey, I said a little prayer of thanks for my good fortune and for the safe capture of a beautiful bird that deserved to be returned to his loved ones.

While I drove back to work I tried to calm my breathing to a level that would allow me to continue the "mundane" activities of my daily life at ZOLL, the medical device company where I work. At this company I am responsible for the department managing human clinical trials to save lives, hearts and brains following cardiac arrest, heart attack, stroke, traumatic brain injury and other heart and brain illnesses – and I can say that the potential for my own cardiac arrest and/or brain injury and subsequent trial participation had occurred to me at least once during that exciting lunch adventure!

It did take me a few hours to calm down from the adrenalin rush, but my heart was full of joy and relief at the accomplishment that the bird, family and I were able to achieve together. Later, when I told my 86-years-old mother the story, after joining me in happiness and amazement at the incredible story, she said in a deadpan tone, "You were wearing slacks, right?" I have no doubt that when I mentioned the words "during work hours" and "up on a ladder", she immediately was concerned about what I was wearing. Only a mother would wonder and be concerned that her daughter might have been up on that ladder in a dress on a workday.

It was quite a spectacular day - and one I will cherish for the rest of my life! Four days later, the Congo African Grey was home with his family – truly wonderful.