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Boomer the Buttless Wonder
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Editor's note: This is the story of Boomer, his rescue and ongoing rehabilitation – one of the more dramatic such stories we have had recently – as told by his foster parent.

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Boomer came to my attention back in late September 2012. I received an email from my friend and former Mickaboo volunteer Darcy Howard about a macaw in a bad situation. Darcy is a paramedic for a local ambulance service who had educated her paramedic partners about parrots. During an emergency call one of Darcy's partners noticed a large cage with a big bird in it. Since he was busy providing care to the lady, he was not able to get a closer look, but what he did see just didn't look right. Later he asked the family about the bird and put them in contact with Darcy. She discovered that the bird was a Greenwing Macaw named

Boomer. The family had been trying to re-home Boomer for some time, but no one wanted him. From the short conversation she had with them, Darcy quickly realized something was wrong with the macaw. She told the family about Mickaboo and offered to put them in contact with us.

I met Boomer in October 2012 to start the surrender process. What I saw was horrible. The first thing I noticed was he did not have a tail. He was filthy, had bald spots, and all of his feathers, except those on his head, had been severely chewed (barbered) or plucked. One eye was glazed with a severe cataract and his nails were so long they corkscrewed. (See picture at right). I swore to myself that I was not leaving that house without him. I was on the verge of tears.



The family told me their mother had had Boomer for about 25 years. Boomer had never seen a vet and no one could handle him. He was on a diet of seed and human food. His favorites were mash potatoes with gravy and goldfish crackers (not a healthy macaw diet). They explained they had tried to find Boomer a new home, but no one wanted him. I asked them if I could take Boomer that day and to my immense relief, they agreed.

Getting Boomer from his cage to the carrier was a challenge. He was absolutely terrified of being touched. There was something wrong with his legs and he had trouble balancing on his perch. At the time I attributed it to his 4+ inch long nails. I took him straight to the nearest avian vet, The Bird and Pet Clinic of Roseville.

The vets were appalled at his condition. Getting him into a bright room revealed more details of Boomer's problems. Boomer not only had what I had seen, but he was almost totally blind, he had an open wound on his keel bone and his legs were so badly crippled it seemed impossible that he could even perch. In addition to all this, his poop was runny and horrendously stinky! Dr. Thompson was concerned that he might not make it through the night. Boomer needed an extensive workup and needed to be under anesthesia for most of it. So they kept Boomer overnight and Dr. Joseph (the head vet) took over his care when she returned that evening.

The next day I talked with Dr. Thompson. Boomer had had X-rays done. His lungs looked a bit hazy but his legs were a mess. There was clear evidence of multiple injuries that had never been treated, plus his

left wing had been broken. While he was under anesthesia Dr. Joseph was able to fully examine his legs. They were so contracted and tight she could not move them. The only joints that had any flexion were one ankle and his toes. Everything else was frozen so tight that she suspected the injuries might go clear back to when he was a hatchling, and some might even have been congenital. She still had trouble believing that he was perching in his cage when I picked him up. She had assumed he had lived in a chicken crate for his whole life.

The bad news was that he was not eating. They had tried tempting him with a variety of foods, but he was not interested. Dr. Thompson even broke down and offered him seeds, but that was a no go. They started tube-feeding him that afternoon to help him get his strength back up.

The next day turned out to be the turning day. The tube feedings had worked wonders and he was now eating and maneuvering about his cage and hanging off the cage door! On October 8, I brought him home. The poor guy was so scared, he whimpered during the entire drive. It's so sad to hear a macaw whimper.

While Boomer was in the hospital I was able to contact the elderly lady who had owned him. It was a sad and frustrating call. She received Boomer from her "other" kids in 1989 when they moved out of state. She thought he was less than a year old at the time. He supposedly had chlamydia as a chick, but was never treated for it. In fact, Boomer had never been to a vet. In 2009, her health had started declining. She was in and out of the hospital all the time and had not been able to give him much attention. I asked her about how he had hurt his legs, but she didn't believe there was anything wrong with his legs. But if there was something wrong with them, she thought it might have happened when he started falling off his perch several years ago. She also was not aware that he had a cataract and was almost totally blind. She "suspected that he was sick", but her medical conditions and lack of money had kept her from taking him to a vet. She said her family tried off and on to sell or even give Boomer away, but no one would take him because of his condition.

The day after I brought him home he started perking up. He was eating almost everything I offered him and started exploring his cage. Two weeks later he was progressing well. For being a crippled and blind guy, he was able to get around his cage amazingly well. I had started teaching him about toys. He decided he liked chewing wood, but had little interest for anything else - unless it was food! I was almost afraid of over-feeding him. He ate everything I put in his dish. I was giving him baths every two or three days. He was not happy about that but would finally relax and enjoy the soaking. The rest of his labs had come back. Overall, they were amazingly good! He did test positive for chlamydia so Dr. Joseph started him on 30 days of doxycycline. Fortunately it would mix in his water. Giving him his medications had not been easy. He had already destroyed at least a dozen syringes.

Boomer continued to improve. His personality was coming out more and more. He liked to dance and be sung to, especially by my wife Jo. He also proved to be a consummate soup maker. He would dunk all of his food! Even when I put the water dish on the opposite side of the cage, he would still waddle back and forth dunking his food.

After a little over two months I was able to take Boomer out of the quarantine room and introduce him to my flock. They quickly accepted him so I moved his cage to the main bird room. He seemed so much happier there. He would dance and when I'd put him on his play top he started exercising his wings. He was also starting to make more noises. He had been so quiet while in the quarantine room. Seeing him blossom like this was so encouraging.

It was soon after bringing him out of quarantine that his poops started smelling again. He didn't poop very often, but when he did it was a huge amount, even for a Greenwing Macaw. It quickly went from smelly to downright gagging stinky. I took Boomer back to Dr. Joseph and she took several cultures and more blood samples, and started him on three medications. When the labs came back, the cultures were negative, but his liver enzymes were way off. Mickaboo then decided to have Boomer be seen by Dr. Speer at the Medical Center for Birds ("MCFB") in Oakley, CA. It would be a long drive, but Dr. Speer is one of the best avian vets around.

The team at MCFB did a full workup on him, including detailed X-rays. Boomer had had X-rays when we first rescued him so I knew his legs were in bad shape. They were obviously deformed and had little or no movement in the joints. But until Dr. Fitzgerald went over his X-rays with me, I had no idea how bad. One hip was completely dislocated. One knee was also dislocated and he essentially has no ankle on the other leg. Every joint was filled with arthritis and fused solid. There are signs of several old fractures. One of the ulnas in his wing had also been fractured. His tail bone was also deformed. It had several curves that should not have been there. Instead of curving up like a normal bird tailbone, it curved downward, partially obstructing his vent. He also had a pressure sore on his bum right where the end of the tailbone poked down. Needless to say, the X-rays were horrendous. I was practically in tears looking at them. Some of the deformities might have been there at birth and some of the injuries could have been received as a nestling, but those cannot account for all the damage his body had endured. Dr. Fitzgerald was very surprised how mobile Boomer actually was. If she hadn't seen Boomer climbing about and perching with her own eyes she would never have believed it.



Normal Bird Tailbone



Boomer's Tailbone

Boomer's blood work came back normal. But his cultures also came back normal, surprising considering how stinky his poops were. The doctors suspected Boomer's deformed tailbone was the real culprit. The way it partially obstructed his vent made it difficult to poop so he was likely holding it in much longer than was healthy and he probably was unable to totally clear it out. Plus the pressure sore on his bum was indeed caused by the tip of the tail bone. It was decided that Boomer would greatly benefit having the last couple of vertebra in his tail removed. The procedure, called a pygostyle amputation, was expected to relieve him of some pain and make it much easier to poop.

On January 31, 2013, Boomer had his surgery. Boomer recovered quickly, soon pooping like a normal Greenwing Macaw, and seemed much happier. I was able to take him home two days later. We now refer to him as Boomer the Buttless Wonder!



As Boomer continued to recover he was increasingly active. I usually involve my birds in my daily activities like doing dishes and folding laundry and every night the birds have dinner with the whole family. I felt bad for Boomer because he was stuck in his cage. I came up with an idea on how to fix this. I built a platform with 4" high walls topped with 2" PVC tubes so he could not climb over them. I mounted the platform on a wheeled cart and now Boomer could join us. The first night he joined us for dinner he was so excited! And after dinner he started chattering. He had never done this before! I got it on [video](#) too! Not only was he able to travel around the house with the rest of the family, but I could take him outside on the

patio where he could join the other birds in the aviary and enjoy the fresh air and sunshine.

Boomer the Buttless Wonder continues to do great today. He loves to eat, play tug, nap on the patio and dance. He even sings now. He can be a real grump at times and will throw his dishes around and just generally grumps about. And don't leave him by himself in the bird room. He will quickly let you and the rest of the neighborhood know he is not happy! But generally he is a happy guy who does not let his handicaps get in the way. He enjoys car rides and has been a Mickaboo spokes-bird at several outreach functions. He inspires everyone who meets him. I truly love this old guy and have nothing but admiration for him! He will always have a home with my flock and family while he stays in Mickaboo's foster flock.