

Article from "The Mickaboo Bird Rescue Companion"
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Featured Volunteer: Priya Tuvell By Shauna Hill



We have many volunteers who work outside of Mickaboo to help animals in need. In this newsletter I wanted to highlight one of these awesome folks who not only volunteers with Mickaboo but is also pursuing a career in veterinary medicine. Please enjoy the following interview with Priya Tuvell.

SH: Tell us about yourself. Did you grow up having pets?

PT: I moved frequently when I was younger, but one thing was always constant: our pets. I grew up with parents who would rescue dogs from traffic, take in abandoned baby animals, and welcome parrots found in the yard. We had turtles, rabbits, a dove, dogs, and parrots. This love and fondness for animals, and animal rescue, was instilled in me from the moment I was born.

The first dog I adopted on my own was a 12-year-old blind and deaf Yorkshire terrier with deformed ribs, no teeth, and no lower jaw. And she ruled the house. She passed away before I transferred to UC Davis, where I lived with my Meyers parrot, a cat, two dogs, and my leopard gecko, all in my college bedroom. I also had 2 sick leopard geckos that I rescued, rehabilitated, and rehomed on my own. Having so many animals in college was challenging, but I arranged my school and social schedule around my pets. We went to the dog park frequently and I would schedule play dates for them with other students' dogs. I had a stroller for my cat so he could safely enjoy the outdoors. My parrot was flighted and loved being able to explore and forage in the apartment.

I now live with my parents while I focus on my Master's degree. The combined household has 5 dogs, 4 parrots, 3 cats, 1 gecko, and 2 fish tanks!

I previously worked as a veterinary nurse, and am working on completing my degrees in veterinary tech and Masters of Agriculture. In my (very little) free time, I enjoy knitting, reading, and hiking with my dogs.

SH: How did you hear about Mickaboo?

PT: I first heard about Mickaboo in 2009. My Senegal parrot suddenly passed away and my heart ached without her. I was looking into buying another bird but then I came across Mickaboo. I had no idea parrot rescue existed; I have always been pro-rescue so adoption became the obvious choice. Once I took Mickaboo's Bird Care class I realized that while adopting a bird would help that bird, volunteering meant that I could help many more birds find better lives. And so I became a conure team volunteer, doing phone screens and responding to emails.



Tuvell Flock Members

I trained to do home visits and teach the Basic Bird Care class. I learned how to keep the databases updated, and eventually became conure team coordinator ... then ringneck coordinator, then Telegraph Hill conure coordinator, and then Rosella coordinator - at all at the same time!

At that time, I was also a full-time science major at the local junior college and worked part-time as a veterinary nurse. I also fostered ringnecks, budgies, a pigeon, a red-lored amazon, and a cockatiel. Later I joined Mickaboo's behavior team helping foster parents, adopters and the public with behavior problems they were experiencing with their parrots. I also trained on how to teach our Advanced Avian Lighting class and will likely train on how to teach our new, upcoming Advanced Behavior class. I had to dial back my volunteer commitments once I transferred to UC Davis as an Animal Science major (the program is ranked #1 in the world and extremely rigorous), though I still taught the Basic Bird Care class for the pre-vet clubs and the public while in Davis. I was also an Assistant Vice President to the Pre-Vet Club, President of College 4H, and Media Coordinator for Young Cattleman's Association, and volunteered at a nearby heritage fiber sheep farm, with local beef and dairy cattle facilities, and two research labs working with cattle welfare and cattle immunology. I briefly volunteered at UC Davis's Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital's small animal and equine neonatal intensive care units.

Once I moved back home and began my Masters degree, my life settled down a little bit, and I am again a co-coordinator for the conure team.

SH: What other volunteer opportunities have you had?

PT: An opportunity that opened up to me by being involved with Mickaboo was being able to study the endangered Echo Parakeet on the African island of Mauritius (previous home of the Dodo bird). My knowledge of parrot behavior made me the ideal person for the project. They wanted to see if the Echos stayed near the nesting sites and boxes outside of breeding season or not. If not, they wanted to close up the nesting boxes so other birds and bees would not invade the Echos' nesting sites. My study showed that Echo nest sites are very active during the off-season, so closing these sites would have been detrimental to the birds' social and emotional health. Though this finding meant more nest box maintenance, it was in the birds' best interest. Usually, they only take Masters or PhD students as project assistants so I felt very honored to be invited to participate, as I had not even finished my B.S. at this point. Living in an outdoor cabin in an African rain forest with no running water, and an outdoor kitchen and bathroom, and being able to learn about wildlife conservation and wild parrots was a once in a lifetime experience.

Pictures from my time on Mauritius:





I can't imagine life without Mickaboo. The dedication, knowledge, utter selflessness and standard of care by the volunteers never cease to amaze me. In the future, my fiancé and I hope to venture to larger species and try our hand at fostering macaws and cockatoos. And I would eventually love to add another *Poicephalus* to my flock – they are my absolute favorite.

SH: Thank you, Priya, for taking the time to do this interview. We certainly thank you for all you have done and continue to do for Mickaboo and wish you the best in your studies! You have an amazing future ahead of you.