



Meet and Greet: Zapper's Rescue Story

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<https://youtube.com/watch?v=8MLh3JDVWhQ>

<https://nerdfighteria.info/v/8MLh3JDVWhQ>

It's time for another Meet and Greet! I'm Jessi here at Animal Wonders and I want to share another one of our amazing animal ambassadors.

(Intro)

This is Zapper the Alexandrine parakeet. I'm going to go ahead and put him back for now because he's really loud. Augusto and I first heard of Zapper in winter of 2012 when our veterinarian mentioned that a family needed help with several of their large parrots. She asked if we had room for several Amazon parrots and possibly a macaw. At the time, our bird room was fairly full and I wasn't sure if we had enough time to devote to several large, older parrots that might not like to be handled, let alone go out to presentations. I told her to have the owner contact me and we'd figure out what to do.

When the owners called, they asked if Animal Wonders would compensate them for their birds. This happens from time to time, people want us to buy animals off of them. When we let them know we didn't have the funds to purchase the animals, they said they wanted to look for a home that would. A few months went by and we got another call. This time, they wanted us to just take the birds because they couldn't find anyone to pay for them. They did care for their birds and they really wanted to make sure they were going to a good place because older parrots, cockatoos and macaws can be really difficult to work with sometimes. Some never re-bond to their new owners and some take years before they trust anyone. So these birds needed to go to a home that knew the challenges that come with adopting them. In the summer of 2013, we drove to meet our new friends and hopeful new ambassadors, and that's where we met Zapper and a bunch of his friends.

I'm telling you this whole backstory because I want to let you know how so many of our animals come to us. I'd like to say that we're the lucky ones because we get to take care of so many of these displaced animals but, truly, the animals that come to us are the lucky ones. So many of them are passed from home to home to people who think they're getting the deal of a lifetime - a free parrot. When in reality, they may have read up on what to expect from a younger parrot purchased from a breeder but they're in no way prepared for the challenging journey of rehabilitating an older parrot with a lifetime of loss and trauma.

Okay, back to Zapper. Don't worry, the story does have a happy ending! We arrived at the family's house and they asked if we would take six birds. It was a really big ask. We said yes, and then we began the process of integrating them into our daily routine and eventually into our educational programs. Zapper was easily the most outgoing of the bunch. He was anxious and he did get stressed out about a lot of things but he never stopped vocalizing and he wanted to be involved in everything. The biggest obstacle I had to overcome with Zapper was his insistence to climb down my arm and up onto my shoulder. If he did finagle his way up there, he would try and bite my face if I tried to get him off. After a few weeks, I was finally able to keep him satisfied on my hand. Lots of treats were involved in this process! He now accepts a toe-hold, which is where I put my thumb over his toe to remind him to stay on my hand, facing me.

In the beginning, it took several months for Zapper to settle into his new surroundings. He was very anxious and he exhibited stress behaviors. One of the things he would do is climb the wall up onto the ceiling and repeat that motion over and over. This is known as a stereotypical behavior and we wanted him to engage in healthier behaviors. So we gave him a different enclosure and new toys every other day. Zapper immediately started foraging behaviors. He loved shredding wooden and paper toys, and his stereotypical behaviors ceased, and he became calmer and more engaged in social interactions. Within about four months, he was doing his first

public presentation. We learned that his favorite treat is an almond in the shell. It's a great treat for him but also the audience because they get to see him crack it open with his impressive beak.

Zapper was recently moved into an even larger enclosure when we made some upgrades. Overall, the move has been great. Zapper is a little bit stressed by being in a new space, but he's settling in faster than he did during his last move. I think the best part of moving him into the larger enclosure is seeing his extremely long tail feathers in all their glory. Even though he has a similar body size to an Amazon parrot, he's a parakeet! So, he has longer tail feathers. And over the last couple of years, he's been rubbing his longest tail feathers against the walls and breaking them off. With a bigger enclosure, he rarely touches the walls at all. I can't say it enough - I'm so thankful that we're able to continually improve the lives of the animals that we rescue. From being able to rescue him from his previous owner to identifying problems and being able to improve his mental well-being, to upgrading his home space, I can only see great things in his future.

Thanks for letting me share Zapper with you! If you'd like to go on an adventure with us every week, you can subscribe to our YouTube channel, Animal Wonders Montana. If you have any questions for me or Zapper, you can ask us on Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook. Thanks, guys.

(Outro)

A few weeks ago we introduced Joy and Zapper to their new enclosures and we asked you all if you wanted to buy them housewarming gifts. This is how you responded.