

Welcome to the Zoo, little Runt!



There are often times in nature when runts of litters are abandoned and left to die. Why? It takes time and energy to raise young. If a Mama realizes that a newborn is not a fit offspring, she chooses, instead, to dedicate time and energy to the remaining stronger youngsters. Our newly-acquired Keel-billed toucan, “Runt” is an example of this type of occurrence in nature.

Found floundering on the ground in the forests of Cayo, little Runt was mercifully rescued by Mr. Jonathan Urbina of The Peregrine Fund. Runt was still in fledgling stage, all feathers were not in place, and flying was not part of his lifestyle. His should-be-beautiful beak was anything but! Dented, and pale, it was clear that he had lacked proper nutrition as a hatchling. The little bird’s eyes were not functioning, due to being affected by a bacterium. In short, little Runt was in big bad shape!

With over twenty years of emergency care experience, and much of that under the guiding advice of expert vets, Animal management Supervisor Humberto Wohlers put together a menu of “Runt relief” measures that have seen the little bird mend in quick time.

Immediately, zoo officials thought that introducing Runt to the trio of Keel-billed toucans scheduled to be brought onto zoo-lands by October, was the way to go. However, a change of plans had to happen. The robust toucan-trio would not take kindly to the smaller, weaker newcomer. Keel-billed toucans are aggressive birds. Not only do they eat fruits and seeds in

the wild, but they happily stick those long bills into the nests of other birds, kidnap their nestlings, and gulp them down with joy!

Runt clearly showed all of us that he adored his human caretakers . The little bird enjoys being hand-fed and absolutely LOVES his head massaged. We decided that Runt, our cute representative National Bird, will become an “Encounter Toucan”. He loves the company. And visitors will have the chance to interact with the National Bird of Belize.

Once again, The Belize Zoo has rescued, rehabilitated, and readjusted an animal that otherwise would have perished in the wild. The added plus to this is that happy little Runt will bring happiness to others, too. We thank The Peregrine Fund, the caring people at Black Rock Lodge in Cayo, Dr. Ivy Cowell, and the zoo animal management crew for such fine collaborative work. It is now possible to “meet and greet” our little friendly national bird at The Best Little Zoo in the World. Runt Rocks!!!!

