Stolen pet macaw, Tutti, found in N.O. pet store

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Tutti the ruby macaw is back home, thanks to his unique vocabulary and some sharp detective work by one of his owners.

And for Rachel and Ali Haghighi, who had lost Tutti to birdnappers eight days earlier, all was right with the world Wednesday.

Witnesses said three college-aged men grabbed the rare $3,000 pet from his perch outside of Haghighi’s Oriental Rugs off Airline Highway, hopped back into a black Acura and sped away shortly after 5 p.m. on election day.

The Haghighis called city police and the Sheriff’s Office to report the theft of their pet, but held out little hope for the bird because it requires proper care to survive.

On Tuesday, Rachel Haghighi got a call from a friend who knew someone who had overheard a couple of guys in a bar bragging about finding a strange bird.

The caller said the guys had talked about how they took the bird to a New Orleans pet store.

Acting on the tip, Rachel Haghighi packed up her 8-year-old son David and headed for the Crescent City, figuring only she or her husband could identify the bird.

“We got a map and we got the Yellow Pages” and began checking all the pet shops in the New Orleans area, she said.

They started at a pet store in a mall.

No Tutti.

Then to another shop.

Still no Tutti.

After two more futile tries, Rachel Haghighi pulled up to a shop in Kenner.

“As soon as we saw him, we knew it was him,” she said.

Authorities had told her that, if she found the bird, she

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should not confront the person, but to call police.

“We went in like we were shopping for a Christmas present,” the bird-owner-turned-detective said. But as she talked to the shop’s owner, Tutti recognized her voice and began to edge closer.

Tutti then started saying “Baba, Baba,” which is what Tutti calls Ali Haghighi. The words mean “daddy” in Persian.

“I knew I needed to get out of there before I blew it,” Rachel Haghighi said. “But we were determined not to come back without the bird.”

She went to a pay phone next door and called Kenner Police. The confused Kenner Police officer asked Haghighi how she was sure it was her bird.

Rachel Haghighi then rattled off a few of the 25 or so words Tutti can say, and told the officer the bird would know them.

Sure enough, Tutti came through and said some of the words.

Then, Haghighi produced a photograph of Tutti and a newspaper article about the theft of the exotic bird. Convinced, the officer ordered Tutti returned.

No arrests have been made in the case. The couple doesn’t believe the Kenner pet shop owner knew anything about the theft. He told them that two men came in and asked that he sell their bird on consignment for $1,800.

The pet store owner said the women told him they inherited the bird from their grandmother. The pet store said he did become a bit curious when it kept saying “Baba.”

Rachel Haghighi said Tutti was very quiet on the ride back to Baton Rouge, but that changed when he got back to the shop and saw Ali Haghighi.

When he opened the door to the car the bird “just started rambling,” she said.


“Talking as fast as he could,” Rachel Haghighi said. “He knew he was home and he was glad to be there.”

Wednesday morning, Tutti was back on his perch just outside the shop. One customer began crying when she heard the news that Tutti was home, Ali Haghighi said.

The telephone started ringing again Wednesday, this time people calling to see if it was true that Tutti was alive and safe at home.

By lunchtime, 36 people had stopped by to welcome Tutti home.

“Hello,” Tutti said to some as he munched on grapes and played with a set of brass keys.

Workers at Gambino’s Bakery next door brought Tutti cookies, which he loves. Tutti often walks down the sidewalk to the bakery and taps on the door with his beak, Ali Haghighi said. The clerk obliges with a cookie.

Ali Haghighi said Tutti seems to be still a little in shock and has lost weight since his ordeal, but otherwise is fine.