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What Would You Do for Bongo?

Thu, 2012-11-08 18:09 — Robin Olson

Bongo is seven months old. In that time he's made friends, learned to play and met some very nice people, all while his right front leg didn't function properly. We [rescued him](#) ^[1] before he was going to be euthanized at a shelter not knowing much about him other than something was wrong with his leg. They noted his paw was crushed, but that turned out not the case.



©2012 Maria S. Bongo.

We did tests and x-rays. Bongo met with noted Orthopedic Vet, [Dr. Alan Cross](#) ^[2] of Georgia Veterinary Specialists. **Dr. Cross felt that Bongo, while happy and otherwise healthy, could not feel anything in his right front paw and that he had severe nerve damage that was either not repairable or would be very costly to repair with very little hope for success.** He suggested the best course would be to remove the leg since it was only getting in the way and slowing Bongo down.



©2012 Maria S. Favoring his leg.

We work with a great Vet who helps rescue groups. Her nickname is Doc Thomas and she really knows her stuff. During our rescue of Bongo, Doc had taken a few weeks off-a rare vacation for her and certainly well deserved.



©2012 Maria S. Getting some lovin' from foster sister, Bunny Boo Boo (who needs a home, too!)

We knew she could do the surgery for far less than the \$2000. Dr. Cross quoted us, but we had to wait a few weeks to talk to Doc T about whether she could do it. Dr. Cross felt it was not a rush to do the surgery because Bongo wasn't in any pain.

In the meantime, Maria, Bongo's foster mom noticed Bongo using his leg as a crutch. He couldn't bear weight on it, but he did push litter around and use it to help him balance. He did this by swinging his leg from his shoulder.



©2012 Maria S. Bongo with his new BFF-George who we rescued from an apartment complex in GA.

When I heard about this I thought the same thing Maria did; “Maybe we should talk to Dr. Cross again? Maybe Bongo is getting feeling back?” **The last thing any of us want to do is amputate this cat’s leg unnecessarily.**

Maria contacted Dr. Cross. He felt that it would be very unusual for nerves to begin to work again and that Bongo didn’t have to have the surgery-ever, as long as he wasn’t dragging the limb. **Dragging the limb meant he’d get infections in it eventually and that’s dangerous especially because he can’t feel if something is wrong.**



©2012 Maria S. Bongo with catnip banana.

Maria took Bongo to meet Doc Thomas today who has done plenty of amputations for other rescue groups. **She looked at Bongo’s x-rays and examined him and came to the same opinion—Bongo does not need to lose his leg at this time.** If it’s not bothering him, then leave it.

We worried that as Bongo ages he would have arthritis in his shoulder or as he grows larger and gains weight, that the constant pull of his “dead” leg would give him back pain.



©2012 Maria S. His leg problem doesn't stop him from climbing.

Both Vets agreed that he should be just fine. **If he drags the leg it has to go**, but as long as he's holding it up, running around and having fun, then for now it can stay. **It's really up to us if we feel he would be better without it in the way.**

So again, Maria and I are wondering what to do. Neither of us want to take Bongo's leg, but how will that effect his future? **Would he be better off if we amputated his leg now so he could adjust and so we can oversee his care before he gets adopted** or is he more adoptable with a leg that doesn't function? **What if he got his leg stuck somewhere because he couldn't feel it and was home alone and did worse damage to himself?**



©2012 Maria S. Brothers from other mothers.

Fortunately, Bongo is adorable and affectionate. Leg or no leg we'll find him a wonderful home one day. **It would be easy to leave the leg alone because we don't want him to lose it, but what is best for Bongo? He has to be considered first and last...**not us...not our ideas of what might not be as appealing to adopters or what might make us feel sad for Bongo's sake.

Choosing what's best for Bongo is very difficult. Perhaps we have our answer now and just have to accept it? Perhaps we need to do something more difficult and have the amputation done?



©2012 Maria S. Da boyz.

I don't know, but I'm grateful we have the luxury of seeing how it goes and waiting on making any firm decisions.

I've never had to have a cat's leg amputated and am unsure what is the best course of action. If Bongo was your cat what would you do?

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Comments

Thu, 2012-11-08 18:34 — Anna (not verified)

WWID ^[16]

If Bongo was my cat I'd have my animal communicator, Carolee, ask him what he wanted to do.

Fri, 2012-11-09 10:39 — [Teri and the ca...](#) (not verified) ^[17]

Bongo ^[18]

I like the animal communicator idea. I do think that with his leg amputated, as you said, he would not run the risk of injuring it. Arthritis etc...heck, cats suffer from that even with 4 healthy legs, so not a part of the decision really. I think he would adjust easily whether you did the amputation now or later, so again, not part of how I would decide. Of course, us catmoms worry about all the what if's in life anyway. I don't know if it makes any difference at all, but I think I would wait until all his bone growth was complete before doing it, as it may lessen the stresses on the other growing bones and maybe lead to less 'deformity' in the spine etc? You might ask your vets about that. I remember a friend who did rabbit rescue had a baby bunny who they had to amputate a hind leg on, and he grew up all 'twisted' in his spine and I wonder if that had been done as an adult if the same thing would have happened.

Fri, 2012-11-09 10:40 — [Connie & The Crew](#) (not verified) ^[19]

While I worked at the vet's ^[20]

While I worked at the vet's office I saw a couple of amputations and saw quite a few three legged kitties. Also volunteering at the shelter I've seen crippled legs.

I can tell you that kitties do very well having their legs removed. Because their joints are so flexible, it is a lot easier on them than us. They adjust pretty quickly - especially when they are younger. If you take it now he will have youth on his side, and you won't end up with the 'what ifs' and you won't have to worry about his claws growing into his pads.

Also aesthetically, seeing a kitty with a crippled foot is just hard to look at emotionally. Since you are going to put him up for adoption, you do have to consider what the public will think. Will they see him in a cage with his crippled leg and think why

haven't you done something to help this boy? This leads to you having to take time to explain his situation. this might be a good thing in that you get more outreach, but how many people are going to see it and be disgusted with you and just walk away?

not that this is a good reason to take off a leg, just a thought to be had along with the what ifs of nails, the paw getting caught, etc.

You can probably see that I'm headed down the road of take it off now before it is a problem that might make it more difficult on him in the future to take it off.

Fri, 2012-11-09 11:24 — Alexis M (not verified)

I think that even if Bongo ^[21]

I think that even if Bongo may not need the amputation *yet*, it would be best to get it done anyway. He's only going to get bigger and heavier as he grows, and the leg will probably pose more risks later in life such as the arthritis pain that was mentioned. A positive point to keep in mind, is that animals, especially when they are younger, usually adapt quickly to amputations and learn to run and play and live normal lives. There's lots of videos on YouTube showing the many animals with only 3 legs doing very well, you should check them out! The way I see it, his leg is about as useful as a human's appendix right now. It is serving no purpose for him, except eventually getting in his way and potentially causing him some much more serious health risks later on.

Whatever you decide to do, I wish all the best luck for Bongo and everyone else involved. :)

Fri, 2012-11-09 11:56 — AM Stewart (not verified)

Bongo ^[22]

Based on what the two doctor's said, I would say to leave Bongo as is for now. Yes, he might get his "dead" leg stuck in something because he can't feel it or perhaps he might get arthritis from carrying it around instead of walking on it. However, he might also get his head stuck in a bannister rail or he might get arthritis as a result of old age.

Like most animals that have disabilities, they learn to cope with it as best they can. I'm not saying that amputation is a bad thing in this instance, but to me it's only necessary if he does indeed drag it and it's prone to infection. Otherwise give the little guy a chance to adjust and you might be surprised how well he does.

Amputation - like extinction - is forever. Hopefully you can find a forever home and someone who can love Bongo as he is, seeing beyond his limitations. I wish you luck in whatever decision you make.

Fri, 2012-11-09 11:58 — Jane (not verified)

If Bongo was my cat, I will ^[23]

If Bongo was my cat, I will keep his leg. I will massage his leg everyday and looking for ways to stimulate the nerve and hopefully it will eventually come back.

Fri, 2012-11-09 12:23 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

Bongo's leg ^[24]

I would leave it alone. I have met any number of cats at the Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Utah who have similar issues. Unless the leg is actually getting in his way, there's no need to amputate now. Especially since Bongo is using it, I think he needs to keep it. If there's concern about him dragging it, he might be a candidate for Leggings for Life, a non-profit group that crochets custom leggings for pets to prevent injuries from dragging along the ground. You can find them on Facebook and the leggings are free. If his leg becomes a problem later in life you can always do the amputation then. Cats adjust quickly.

Fri, 2012-11-09 12:30 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

I would leave the surgery on ^[25]

I would leave the surgery on the back burner. Watch Bongo as he moves around the house, if the leg is truly bothering him, or somehow making him a "target" for the other cats/animals in the house to pick on him.

Can he jump and run and play just as rough and tumble as the other cats? I would not let him go out with the leg being an issue just because you don't know about what he might get into out doors, and injuries.

Fri, 2012-11-09 13:34 — Phil Velasquez (not verified)

Bongo ^[26]

Bongo seems to have learned to use his "bad leg" to his advantage and he's

not in pain. I would leave his leg alone.

Fri, 2012-11-09 13:55 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

What I Would Do ^[27]

I'm just a kid but I'd do what's best for Bongo. If I had to choose, I'd have him get his leg amputated. He's just a kitten and could adjust easily. It may make him less adoptable, or, his "helplessness" could make him more adoptable. Either way, it's more of an adult's choice.

Fri, 2012-11-09 16:36 — [Stacy Hurt \(not verified\)](#) ^[28]

Bongo ^[29]

I agree with your vets. Leave the leg unless it's causing him pain. And Holy Cod is he just too adorable!??

Fri, 2012-11-09 16:51 — Aimee (not verified)

What would I do ^[30]

I agree with the vets if it is not necessary yet then I wouldn't do it. I've become friends with Willow on Facebook.. she's a beautiful orange tabby little girl with two crippled back legs and she scoots and runs around like lightning! I would contact Leggings For Life to see if they would make leggings for Bongo. They have helped many cats and dogs with disabled legs and kept them from getting ulcers! Leggings for Life is non profit and they are also on face book. They make leggings to order. (of course I crochet so I'd probably make the leggings myself.. but as far as I know you don't.. and considering how little time you have I don't recommend another thing for you to do! :))I would know that the possibility in the future would be to amputate.. but if he is healthy and happy at this point.. then I would just leave him as he is and know that someone loves him as he is. :)

Fri, 2012-11-09 17:54 — Jynx macTavish (not verified)

Bongo's leg ^[31]

Hi Robin - This is definitely a difficult decision, but after going back and forth a few times, this, in my humble opinion, is what I would do. Since Bongo is going to be adopted out, I would go ahead with the amputation now. It is impossible to know how the fortunes of even a very stable family will fair in the future, and it could be that if/when Bongo finally really needs surgery, his adopters may not be able to afford it, or to afford the best surgeon.

You know you have a good surgeon now, you can get the funds, Bongo is a young, resilient cat. If he had any feeling in that foot, I think I might waver on the other side, but I know you understand the risks in having an appendage you can't feel, and your concerns about him getting it caught, or having it become injured or infected, are warranted.

Also, ageing as I am, I fully know the burdens of extra weight! He's light as a feather right now, I'm sure. But hauling that leg around may really mess with his back in time.

So, that's my take on this, but, of course, I don't have that adorable little boy bouncing around while I write this. I'll be thinking of Bongo and you, and hoping for the best.

As always, thanks for doing what you do!

Fondly,

Jynx

Sat, 2012-11-10 00:36 — Terri (not verified)

Bongo surgery ^[32]

In my opinion - if you have the financial means for the rescue to take on the surgery, I would do it. There are a couple of strong reasons for this - which follow..

A. Recovery time - as a younger boy, his recovery from a major surgery such as this would logically be far quicker and easier than if it were later in life. Also kittens I believe more accepting of major changes, where an older cat may have the potential for more psychological type side effects.

B. Once Bongo has his forever home, in the event that surgery is eventually needed (hypothetically years down the road), who is to say for certain that his new family would willingly take on task? Having worked in a shelter, as well as a vet clinic - I have seen far too many animals either surrendered - or even euthanised due to impending expenses (read: expensive surgery). It is a sad reality of the economy today, that many families faced with the choice of putting groceries on the table,

or a costly orthopedic surgery for their cat, would opt for groceries - as there is simply not enough money to cover both, no matter what their hearts desire. I would hate to see Bongo fall into either a shelter or worse due to an economical setback.

I think that covers it....yes it is a difficult decision - and yes, there is a chance that he may never ever need to have the leg removed. You did however bring up many very legitimate concerns, potential for injury and infection are high, and odds are that at some point he would experience one of those if not both in his life. So if it were me, and I had the means to do so - I would go the surgery route now....

Sat, 2012-11-10 14:23 — Holly's mom (not verified)

Bongo [33]

Apparently, Bongo does not think that his right leg is useless or "in the way". He plays. He climbs. And in just one month of Maria's care he has learned to use his damaged limb for balance and to push around litter by swinging his leg from his shoulder. (*It's interesting to note that the ortho vet changed his original recommendation when he learned of these developments*). What more might Bongo be capable of if he is allowed to continue to grow and develop in the same kind of safe kitty-friendly (indoor only!) environment that encourages play, climbing, sisal scratching, & socializing that one would provide for any feline companion.

His risk of getting caught/injured in some mishap is no more or less than any other indoor cat's. Besides providing an appropriate environment, a responsible pet parent should be checking his limb regularly (say during a lap cuddle) for abrasions, swelling, etc. As far as arthritis from wear and tear..... it is a given for most cats and dogs if they are lucky to live long enough.

Amputation as a preventive measure or as a response to human anxiety over any number of 'what-if' scenarios seems rather over the top at this point in Bongo's life. As long as the affected limb's tissue remains free of infection I would allow him to continue to grow and adapt to his circumstance. There are no foregone conclusions here. Except, perhaps, one: I am confident that Robin's organization will find the best possible home for this special little guy with people who understand his needs, present and future.

Sun, 2012-11-11 00:15 — Cattails5 (not verified)

I'm not a big fan of medical [34]

I'm not a big fan of medical intervention. If he were mine, I would not have the leg removed until such time as it became medically necessary (if ever). If he were mine. But you're not keeping him. That's the sticking point for me. He's going to be adopted out - what if something were to happen and his new family didn't have the vet resources you do? You know you have good surgeons. Still, I don't think I could put a kitten through a major, life changing, procedure like that without it being a critically needed situation.

Bongo and George are way way too cute together - someone needs to open up heart and home to not one but two little guys and take them together!!!

Sun, 2012-11-11 19:18 — A Proper Bostonian (not verified)

Bongo [35]

Man, he's gorgeous. I wish I could have met him. He's my kind of guy.

Since you have many conflicting ideas, worries, and opinions, and since Bongo isn't in imminent danger, I'd say: Hang on, and keep watching him like a hawk to see whether he's improving or not, or showing signs of discomfort or pain, and eventually you'll have an answer — from him.

In the meantime, it might help you to get another expert opinion from an orthopedic cat specialist if you can. I know that you probably feel you're drowning in opinion and speculation right now, but another experienced voice might bring some clarity. At any rate, you don't seem ready for a final decision and neither does Bongo; you need certainty and he needs more time to heal, if that's what's happening. Things are still developing, and maybe for the best.

While it's probably true that an amputation on a younger cat means an easier recovery, Bongo is going to be young for many months to come. He's already been through so much, so you know he's a strong survivor. But if you can save his leg, it would be so much better for him. Why not give it time, since the doctors think you can. There's no need to rush things.

And don't worry about whether he'll be more adoptable with or without his poor leg, and what his new family might or might not do for him. He's a peach and you're really good — you'll find the right family for him and you'll be able to trust them. I'm sure of it!

Tue, 2012-11-13 10:53 — Virginia (not verified)

I would not amputate ^[36]

I had a boyfriend back in highschool that severed a nerve in his hand, and eventually he got almost full function back. It is amazing what bodies can do to heal, and since Bongo is using that leg, even from the shoulder, I'd let it go for now. Maybe kitties can adapt to the surgery easily, but kitties can also have complications from surgery too. In another month, Bongo may be using that leg way more than he is now, and if you take it away from him, he will never have that chance.

As a person with 9 cats, I would take a cat with a crippled leg in a heart beat.

Arguing on the other side, we had a kitten that was born feral that had the paw injured badly (we think someone tortured the mom and cat) and needed amputation because of infection. We couldn't afford to have it done and with a great deal of sadness, the kitty had to be put to sleep. So I know what it is like agonizing over if someone in the future who couldn't afford the surgery. Mom and the two remaining siblings were taken into our house and adopted so that no one could ever harm them again.

I don't envy you your choice.

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