



NEWS RELEASE

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Injured San Nicolas Island Fox Pup Gets a Second Chance

(February 20, 2024) Santa Barbara, CA - Each fall, a dedicated crew of experienced biologists travel to San Nicolas Island – part of Naval Base Ventura County (NBVC) – to conduct the annual population survey of the State Threatened San Nicolas Island fox (*Urocyon littoralis dickeyi*), one of six island fox subspecies that only occur on the California Channel Islands. Conducted annually since 2000, the population survey provides critical information to the NBVC Environmental Division Natural Resources Program about the health and status of this unique population.

On September 17, 2023, the team captured a female pup with a recent open fracture of the metatarsal bones of the right hind leg. Once the field crew stabilized her, a veterinary consultation was made. Due to the severity of her injury, the limited medical resources available, and the length of the recovery time needed, treatment while on island was deemed not feasible. The cause of the injury could not be determined but her chance for survival without intervention was minimal due to the risk of infection and septicemia posed by the open fracture. Releasing her without treatment with such an injury was determined to be both inhumane and life threatening.

Due to her young age and prospects of a good prognosis if she were to receive appropriate treatment, special authorization was obtained from California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to transport this state-protected species off-island and off NBVC's federal lands and into state jurisdiction. For biosecurity purposes, once off-island, the island fox could not return, as she could pose a potential health risk to the rest of the remote island population. Diseases and other pathogens that are common on the mainland can be novel and deadly to the island fox, which evolved in isolation with no previous exposure or immunity to common illnesses.

The [Santa Barbara Zoo](#), which partners with the Department of Defense and many other federal, state, and local agencies on the conservation of a variety of sensitive species native to the region (including western snowy plovers and southwestern pond turtles), also has extensive experience in caring for orphaned and injured island foxes. The Zoo readily agreed to take the fox into their care. Vice-President of Animal Care and Health, Dr. Julie Barnes stated "Santa Barbara Zoo has worked with conservation partner agencies for many years to preserve this species on the Channel Islands. We are happy to provide care for this young fox while she recovers from her injury. She will be a wonderful ambassador for her species on the mainland, helping to educate the public about island foxes, their exceptional island ecosystems, and the threats that they face."

On September 19, 2023, the young fox embarked on her grand journey to unexplored territory—a plane flight and one-way trip to the mainland where she was transferred to the care of the Santa Barbara Zoo. Upon arrival at the Zoo, she was assessed by the veterinary team to determine the extent of the injury and to formulate a treatment plan. In consultation with veterinary orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Steve Klause, conservative treatment consisting of wound care, antibiotics, a splint, and bandaging to facilitate fracture repair was implemented. While the fox had otherwise responded well, the fracture did not heal as hoped and a surgical repair for internal fixation for the fracture was conducted on December 16, 2023.

"The Friends of the Island Fox is a nonprofit organization which supports efforts to preserve and protect the island fox through conservation, research, and education programs," Mike Watling, President. "On behalf of this remarkable species, we launched a fundraising campaign to help pay for the unexpected expense of the specialist surgery which could not be done by in-house Zoo staff."

The surgery was successful but required an extended period of healing, so the fox returned to the Zoo. Once fully recovered, the fox will be transferred to a permanent home. The Santa Barbara Zoo is already home to island fox brothers, Lewis and Clark, and therefore cannot house her permanently. Upon final approval from CDFW, she will be placed at an Association of Zoos and Aquariums [AZA] accredited facility where she will serve as an ambassador for the species - the first known San Nicolas Island fox to do so!

About the Santa Barbara Zoo

The Santa Barbara Zoo is open daily from 9 a.m. for members and 9:30 a.m. for general admission until 5 p.m.; general admission is \$25 for adults, \$15 for children 2-12, and free for children under 2. Parking is \$11. The Santa Barbara Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). AZA zoos are dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great visitor experience, and a better future for all living things. With more than 200 accredited members, AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation and is the public's link to helping animals in their native habitats. Visit www.sbzoo.org.

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