

Lost Catalina Island fox pup reunited with mom

Catalina Island Conservancy shares success story

FOR THE ISLANDER

The Catalina Island Conservancy successfully reunited a Catalina Island fox pup with her mother after nearly two weeks of separation. This success story was both heartwarming and exciting since a successful reintroduction requires extensive knowledge and care and can be prevented by various factors, such as excessive human interaction and extended time away from parents. For this pup, it was the second attempt of reintroduction that proved successful.

Late last month, the pup was found on a dirt road in the interior of the Island and appeared to be in poor condition. The pup was just a few weeks old with her eyes still closed. After two weeks of hard work on the part of the Conservancy and the local veterinarian, Dr. Denney, the pup was deemed healthy and strong enough to return to her family.

Conservancy wildlife biologists Lara Brenner and Emily Hamblen had to proceed carefully to ensure that the pup's family accepted her back into the group since several weeks had gone by. The biologists began by returning to the pup's natal area and saturating the area in specialized fox traps, hoping to capture the mother and assess her physical condition up close. They soon captured several adult foxes, including a female displaying signs of recent lactation. Biologists observed this adult's behavior with the pup and were delighted to see that the pup began to nurse on the female right away – suspecting the adult to be her mother.

The next morning, after allowing the pair to become reacquaint-

ed, the wildlife biologists placed a radio-collar on the adult female and released the two together. Unfortunately, the pup could not keep up with her mother's rapid retreat and confused, returned to the kennel they had shared. The adult female vanished into the brush.

Luckily, the wildlife biologists were able to track the adult female with her radio-collar and could tell that she had not gone far. The biologists retreated a respectful distance while maintaining a visual on the pup in the kennel. Later, under the cover of darkness, the radio-collared female returned and collected her pup. In a video taken by a remote camera, the two are seen scampering off together side by side.

"We'll never know how the pup became separated from her family," Conservancy wildlife biologist Lara Brenner said. "She could have been dropped while the mother was moving her between dens, or even abandoned. Now, in her stronger condition, she has a much better chance of surviving with the help of her family."

Wildlife biologists will continue monitoring the pup's family group for the next several months to ensure that the reintroduction was fully successful. The pup was too small for a radio collar, but was instead marked with a microchip, the size of a grain of rice that will help Conservancy biologists track her future.

Catalina Island foxes are endemic to Catalina Island, meaning this subspecies is unique to the Island and found nowhere else in the world. Due to island biogeography, the fox is federally protected under the Endangered Species Act. Since the entire subspecies is confined to a limited area, any disaster on the Island (i.e., disease, fire) could wipe out the entire population.

The Conservancy is commit-

ted to protecting the wild fox population on the Island. The best way to do that is to help them thrive independently of humans. Catalina Island visitors and residents are reminded to always enjoy wildlife from a distance and to contact the Conservancy if any appear injured.

"If you see a fox pup, or any baby animal, on its own, it's very likely that the parents will come back for it and resume care," said Brenner. "If you think the pup may be injured, or are certain that the parents won't come back, do not touch or move the pup. Please contact the wildlife biologists at the Conservancy right away."

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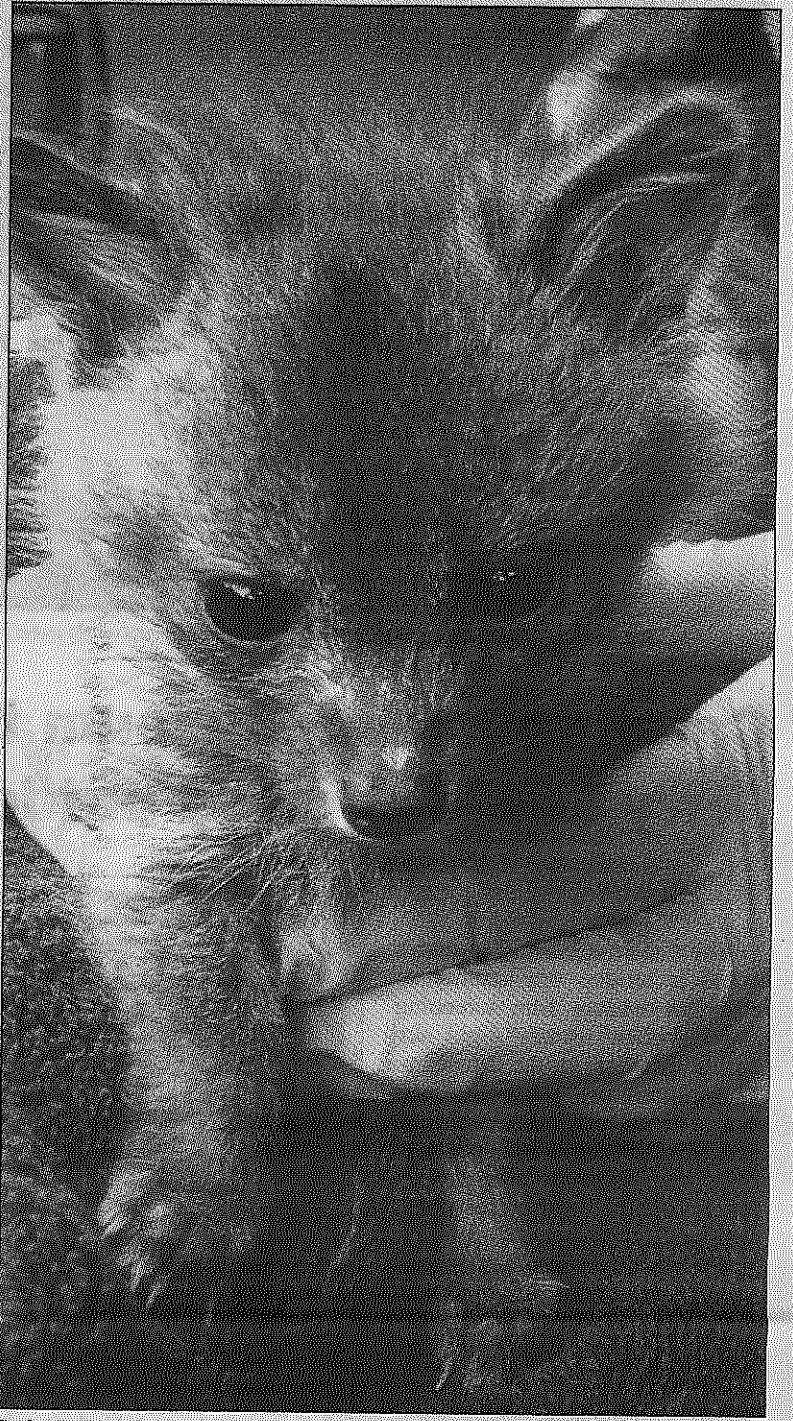
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About the Conservancy

Formed in 1972, the Catalina Island Conservancy is one of California's oldest land trusts. Its mission is to be a responsible steward of its lands through a balance of conservation, education and recreation. Through its ongoing efforts, the Conservancy protects the magnificent natural and cultural heritage of Santa Catalina Island, stewarding approximately 42,000 acres of land and more than 60 miles of rugged shoreline. It provides an airport and 50 miles of biking and nearly 150 miles of hiking opportunities within its road and trail system. The Conservancy conducts educational outreach through two nature centers, its Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Garden and guided experiences in the Island's rugged interior. Twenty miles from the mainland, the Island is a treasure trove



The Catalina Island fox pup that was found alone is now reunited with its mother. Courtesy photos

of historical and archaeological sites. It also contains numerous rare and endangered animals and plants. The Island is home to 60

species – and counting – that are found only on Catalina. For additional information, please visit www.catalinaconservancy.org.

