



CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY

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Increased Human Interactions Pose Dangers to Catalina Island Foxes *Catalina Island Conservancy Working with the Public to Protect Endangered Creatures*

AVALON – The Catalina Island Conservancy’s fox recovery program brought the endangered Catalina Island fox back from the brink of extinction in less than 15 years, resulting in a population of more than 1,700 in 2014.

But more foxes mean more interactions with humans, and those interactions can be dangerous for the foxes. In 2014, at least 25 foxes died from vehicle trauma, poisonings and other interactions with humans and human activities.

“Recovering the endangered Catalina Island fox population so quickly is one of the great conservation success stories,” said John J. Mack, the Conservancy’s chief conservation and education officer. “The Conservancy is going to be engaged in active management of the foxes and many more species on this Island for generations to come because conservation work is never done, especially on an Island visited by nearly one million people each year. Humans have been a part of Catalina’s ecosystem for thousands of years, and the Conservancy is committed to becoming a leader in modeling conservation in a lived landscape.”

In 2014, the Conservancy documented 21 fox deaths associated with vehicle trauma – more than died from all other causes among the deaths that biologists were able to document last year. Biologists believe many more foxes die from vehicle trauma. But their deaths simply go unreported or undetected because the fox is not wearing a radio collar or does not immediately succumb to its injuries while on the road.

Other human-related causes of death in 2014 included two foxes that drowned in uncovered water containers, one that was chased and bitten by an unleashed dog and one that died as a result of ingesting rat poison. Illnesses led to the deaths of another six, and nine deaths are listed as unknown, either because the carcass was too decayed or the necropsy has not yet been completed.

In many cases, the dead foxes are found in locations near trash cans, leading the Conservancy to launch a new program this year to purchase animal-proof trash and recycling containers to protect the foxes on the 42,000 acres it stewards.

Trash cans with no lids or broken lids are “attractive nuisances” that lure foxes from their natural habitats and food sources to these unsecured trash containers, causing the foxes to cross roads or hang

out near roads. Avalon Canyon Road and other roads around the perimeter of Avalon that abut wildlands are noted for their high incidences of fox mortalities.

The nutritionally deficient trash itself can also be harmful to the foxes, and the tiny creatures have become trapped and died inside the older trash cans.

“Identifying and reducing threats to the health and survival of the endangered Catalina Island fox has been a crucial part of the Conservancy’s fox recovery program,” said Julie King, the Conservancy’s director of conservation and wildlife management. “While we cannot document all fox deaths, we can see that the inadequate handling or containment of trash has become a serious threat to foxes and other wildlife. Installing animal-proof trash and recycling receptacles will prevent the foxes and other wildlife from entering the containers and help eliminate trash spills that attract the foxes and other wildlife into inhabited areas and roadsides, where they may be struck by a vehicle.”

The 80-gallon containers require the user to reach inside a covered area to unlatch the lid and open it. The lid then swings shut when the user releases it, securing the trash or recycled materials inside and keeping wildlife out. Altogether, an estimated 150 new animal-proof trash and recycling containers, at a cost of nearly \$2,000 each, will be needed to replace all of the trash cans on the land the Conservancy stewards and in a few high-risk areas in Avalon. The Conservancy is raising funds to finance the purchase and installation of the new animal-proof trash receptacles because they’re needed to protect the Catalina Island fox.

The Conservancy also has erected signs along particularly perilous stretches of road to remind motorists to reduce their speeds and remain vigilant, especially at dawn and dusk when foxes are more likely to be present. It’s placed additional signs at trailheads and specific staging areas to remind the public not to feed foxes. The Conservancy also has expanded its education and outreach efforts to increase the awareness of Island residents and the visiting public about ways to reduce the hazards that may impact the foxes’ survival.

The Conservancy’s wildlife biologists have been closely monitoring the foxes since their numbers plummeted from about 1,300 to just 100 in 1999 because of an outbreak of canine distemper virus (CDV) likely brought to the Island by a stowaway raccoon. An adaptive management program – which included captive breeding from 2001 to 2004, vaccinations against CDV, translocations and monitoring – restored the fox population to more than its pre-crash numbers.

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 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.



Open trash cans with discarded food attract Catalina Island foxes, like this one, spotted inside a trash can. The trash cans attract the foxes to roads where at least 21 died last year as a result of vehicle trauma. The Catalina Island Conservancy has launched a drive to replace existing trash cans with animal-proof containers to protect the endangered foxes. (Photo by Lesly Lieberman).



New animal-proof trash and recycling containers will help protect the Catalina Island fox.