



CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY

Conservation. Education. Recreation.

PRESS RELEASE
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Contact: Pat Maxwell, (909) 587-9034
pmaxwell@catalinaconservancy.org

Catalina Island Conservancy's Fox Recovery Program Enjoys Continued Success ***Population increases by about 350 in one of the Fastest Recoveries of an Endangered Species***

AVALON, CA, March 4, 2014 –The Catalina Island Conservancy reported today that its annual census of the Catalina Island fox found more than 1,850 of the federally endangered animals on the Island, an increase of about 350 over last year.

“The continued increases in the fox population serves as additional proof of the ongoing success of the Fox Recovery Program,” said Ann Muscat, president and CEO of the Catalina Island Conservancy. “In 15 years, this federally endangered species has gone from near-extinction, with a mere 100 foxes on Catalina, to 18 times that many. This is one of the fastest recoveries of an endangered species on record.”

The new report is the result of the annual monitoring program that includes live-trapping, health checks and release of foxes during a few weeks each fall.

The Catalina Island Conservancy, one of California’s oldest land trusts, manages the Island Fox Recovery Program as part of its mission to protect and restore the invaluable natural, cultural and recreational assets of Catalina. The Catalina Island fox is found only on Catalina Island and is the largest endemic species on the Island. Weighing less than six pounds, the fox has been a resident of the Island for more than 6,000 years.

In 1999, canine distemper virus decimated the Island fox population, causing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the Island Fox as an “endangered” species in March 2004. The Conservancy, in coordination with the Institute for Wildlife Studies (IWS), developed a Fox Recovery Program, which included captive breeding, vaccinating the foxes against canine distemper and wild fox population monitoring.

By 2004, the fox population had tripled, and the Conservancy was able to end the captive breeding program. Since then, the Conservancy and IWS have continued to vaccinate and monitor the fox population to ensure its continued recovery.

“We are pleased to see the fox population continue to thrive, especially this year when drought conditions reduced the amount of food available for the foxes,” said Conservancy Wildlife Biologist Calvin Duncan. He conducted the fox count along with Director of Conservation and Wildlife Management Julie King and Wildlife Technician Tyler Dvorak.

This is the first year that Catalina’s fox population has surpassed the number of foxes believed to be living on the Island prior to the introduction of canine distemper virus. In 1990, Gary Roemer, now of

New Mexico State University, and David Garcelon, president and founder of the Institute for Wildlife Studies, estimated 1,342 adult foxes lived on the Island. For comparison, the Conservancy's biologists estimated 1,549 adult foxes and 303 pups lived on the Island in 2013.

Each fox is marked with a microchip inserted under the skin in the scruff area. This is the same technology used to identify pets, it allows proper identification of each individual fox and aids in the annual estimation of the total numbers of foxes on the Island.

The Catalina Island fox, known to science as *Urocyon littoralis catalinae*, is one of six subspecies of island fox in the California Channel Islands. It is a descendant of the gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*), which is believed to have been brought to the Island by early visitors or to have floated over on debris thousands of years ago. Over the centuries, the Catalina Island fox evolved into its own unique subspecies.

Available to Media

1. High resolution photos
2. Background sheet on the Catalina Island fox

About the Catalina Island Conservancy

The **Catalina Island Conservancy** was formed in 1972 and 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. The Conservancy protects the magnificent natural and cultural heritage of Santa Catalina Island, stewarding approximately 42,000 acres of land deeded to the Conservancy in 1975, 62 miles of rugged shoreline and more than 80 miles of trails. It operates the Airport in the Sky, Wrigley Memorial & Botanic Garden and two nature centers. Twenty miles from the mainland, the Island is home to more than 60 plant and animal species found nowhere else in the world. For additional information, visit www.catalinaconservancy.org.