Investigating the Island Fox

By Katie Holder, Santa Barbara Zoo

Did you know that California has a carnivore that can only be found in our state? Meet the island fox. This very special fox lives on six of the eight Channel Islands. The island fox is a fox like the gray fox that you may see in your own backyard, but it has some special differences.

The island fox is much smaller than the gray fox. An adult island fox only weighs about five pounds. A gray fox can weigh thirteen pounds! Also, their fur is much redder than gray foxes, and they have one less tail bone.

Many groups work together to study and protect the island fox. There are many different ways to study foxes. Scientists use radio collars on foxes as one way to study and track them. (Check out the activity below to learn more.) These collars also send out a special signal when the animal wearing them dies. This gives scientists a chance to find out what happened to them and also protect other foxes.

Scientists and vets also work together to keep the island foxes healthy. Other animals like Columbian Ravens that can kill foxes. To protect the foxes, vets and scientists trap island foxes and give them shots. These shots work just like the shots you get from the doctor! The scientists also give the foxes a check-up before letting them go.

The island fox is an amazing animal, and the scientists that protect them work really hard to keep them safe. Want to see an island fox? You can visit the Channel Islands National Park or the new California Trails exhibit, opening on Earth Day, at the Santa Barbara Zoo!

Tracking Tracks — Using Technology to Watch Wildlife

By Liz Mason Gasper, Santa Barbara County Parks

A very important part of any wildlife study or wildlife restoration is keeping track of an animal’s whereabouts. Where does it go in a day? Is it safe? What kind of food does it eat? How active is it at night? Scientists use radio telemetry to track animals that can be very secretive, hard to keep them safe. Want to know more about how to use some of that energy in communications technology? You are using telemetry when you speak into a phone, watch television, or listen to the radio.

There are several kinds of telemetry that biologists use. Most telemetry uses technology to track living creatures, including the bald eagles. Radio telemetry is used to track all kinds of living creatures, including the bald eagle, penguins, and many birds. Scientists use radio telemetry to study and track animals like the bald eagle. Biologicals use communication technology called telemetry to track many kinds of wildlife.

There are several kinds of telemetry that biologists use. Most telemetry tracking systems need three things in order to work: 1. a transmitter; 2. receiver; and 3. antenna. The transmitter is attached to the animal and is powered by a battery, and it sends out a radio signal (really just another form of light energy) that is picked up by the antenna. Next, the antenna sends the signal to the receiver.

If your parent’s car has a radio, it uses similar technology. When you turn on the radio to listen to music, you are hearing your favorite songs through the receiver. The receiver gets the radio signal from the antenna on the car. The antenna picks up the signal from the transmitter—the radio station playing the music.

Using telemetry, biologists with the Institute for Wildlife Studies have learned that since a bald eagle named Stephen Jr. left Santa Cruz Island, he has moved north through California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. Recently he has flown back south to Klamath Lake. Now, he’s back in town. He was last seen on the campus of the University of California at Santa Barbara. Maybe Stephen wants to take a class in telemetry! Telemetry helps us understand animals that can be very secretive, hard to find, far away, or just plain impossible to watch and study through observation. After the opening of the California Trails exhibit on Earth Day, you can be sure to see California condors at the Santa Barbara Zoo.

Catch a Glimpse of the California Condor

By Piper Prestley, Santa Barbara Zoo

Imagine a bird that has a wingspan almost twice your height! That bird is the California condor. California condors have a wingspan of almost ten feet. Condors are large, black, vultures with a bald, red head.

They can be found flying over the Pacific Coast. Locally, these birds can be seen in the Angeles and Los Padres National Forests. Unlike many birds, condors do not build nests. To lay eggs, they find holes in cliffs or trees. California condors have very interesting eating habits. Condors play an important part in the food chain because they eat dead animals, also known as carrion. For some this may seem gross, but for condors it is a natural part of their diet.

Each condor has a tag on it with a number. Each tag can be tracked by researchers to learn more about where they fly, what they eat, and anything else they do that we might have questions about. Using the tags, we learned that condors can fly 150 miles in a single day! There is a lot we still do not know about the California condor, because there are very few condors left in the wild. Many people are working together to learn more about them. If you visit the Los Padres National Forest or Angeles National Forest, you may be lucky enough to catch sight of these interesting animals. After the opening of the California Trails exhibit on Earth Day, you can be sure to see California condors at the Santa Barbara Zoo.

Now Do This! Track an Eagle Activity

By Liz Mason Gasper, Santa Barbara County Parks

You can track Stephen Jr. yourself by going to the Institute for Wildlife Studies website at www.wwf.org. Do a interactive, click on Track an Eagle, then click on Bald Eagles. Follow the directions to use the interactive map. Can you answer the following questions using the map? You can find the answers below.

1. Using the scale of distance on the map, can you estimate how far it is from Santa Cruz Island to Oregon? Oregon?
2. How long did it take Stephen Jr. to fly that distance?
3. How far did Stephen Jr. fly between July 5 and Sept. 2, 2006?
4. How far can Stephen Jr. fly in one week?
5. Stephen Jr. left Santa Cruz Island on July 6, 2006. When did he return? How long did he stay?

Look at the photos below of Eagle 46, named Stephen Jr., who was released on Santa Cruz Island in April 2006. Can you see the transmitter on his back? At the Santa Barbara Zoo you can have an eagle experience with a condor. Join us as we try to see an island fox? You can see the transmitter on his back. At the Santa Barbara Zoo you can have an eagle experience with a condor. Join us as we try to see an island fox? You can see the transmitter on his back. At the Santa Barbara Zoo you can have an eagle experience with a condor. Join us as we try to see an island fox? You can see the transmitter on his back. At the Santa Barbara Zoo you can have an eagle experience with a condor. Join us as we try to see an island fox? You can see the transmitter on his back. At the Santa Barbara Zoo you can have an eagle experience with a condor. Join us as we try to see an island fox? You can see the transmitter on his back.