



San Nicolas Island Restoration Project, California



OUR MISSION

To protect large colonies of Brandt's Cormorants, the San Nicolas Island Fox, the San Nicolas Island Night Lizard, and more from the threat of extinction by removing feral cats.

OUR VISION

Native animal and plant species on San Nicolas Island reclaim their island home and are thriving.

THE PROBLEM

For years, feral cats directly preyed on seabirds and lizards and competed with foxes for resources.

THE SOLUTION

In 2010, the U.S. Navy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Island Conservation, Institute for Wildlife Studies, The Humane Society of the United States, and the Montrose Settlement Restoration Program completed the removal and relocation of feral cats to the permanent, fully enclosed Fund For Animals Wildlife Center in Ramona, California.

THE RESULTS

Native populations of Brandt's Cormorants and Critically Endangered Island Foxes (as listed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and are no longer at risk of competition and direct predation, and no sign of feral cats has been detected since June 2010.

WHY IS SAN NICOLAS IMPORTANT?

- ESSENTIAL NESTING HABITAT FOR LARGE POPULATIONS OF SEABIRD SPECIES
- HOME TO THE ENDEMIC, CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SAN NICOLAS ISLAND FOX AND FEDERALLY ENDANGERED ISLAND NIGHT LIZARD
- HOSTS EXPANSIVE ROOKERIES OF SEA LIONS AND ELEPHANT SEALS



San Nicolas Island This 14,569-acre island, located 61 miles due west of Los Angeles, is the most remote of the eight islands in the Channel Island Archipelago. The island is owned and managed by the U.S. Navy. The island is the setting for Scott O'Dell's prize-winning 1960 novel, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*.



SAN NICOLAS ISLAND RESTORATION PROJECT

San Nicolas Island, one of the eight Channel Islands, provides critical nesting habitat for a variety of seabirds and shorebirds, including Western Gulls, Brandt’s Cormorants, and Federally Threatened Western Snowy Plovers. The island’s natural vegetation, once common throughout California, is now restricted to the most remote or protected corners of the state, such as San Nicolas. Howling winds, extremes of temperature, and torrential storms have created a tough environment, and native life is adapted to these rugged conditions – but not to the presence of non-native feral cats. For years, feral cats threatened San Nicolas’s rare and native island life by directly preying on seabirds and lizards and competing with foxes for resources.

In 2009, the U.S. Navy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Island Conservation, Institute for Wildlife Studies, The Humane Society of the United States, and the Montrose Settlement Restoration Program began relocating feral cats from San Nicolas to a permanent sanctuary on mainland California in an effort to protect native species. This conservation action provides the opportunity for habitat and native species to recover. Native fauna populations will soon recover in the newfound absence of predation and competition pressure by feral cats.

RESTORING AN ISLAND ECOSYSTEM

1. WHAT NATIVE WILDLIFE IS FOUND HERE? San Nicolas Island is a relatively untouched ecosystem, home to numerous species found exclusively in the Channel Islands, including at least 25 invertebrates, 16 plant species, one reptile, three birds, and two mammals. Several at-risk species inhabit the island, including the San Nicolas Island Fox, Western Snowy Plover, and Island Night Lizard. San Nicolas supports three rare native vegetation communities, important seabird colonies and is surrounded by a spectacular marine and intertidal environment teeming with Harbor Seals, California Sea Lions, Southern Sea Otters, and Northern Elephant Seals.



2. HOW DID THE PARTNERS TRACK AND REMOVE FERAL CATS ACROSS SUCH A LARGE TERRAIN? The partners employed cutting-edge technology that helped make the project a success. An extensive field trap monitoring system was deployed, which enabled staff to quickly respond to sprung traps. Field staff utilized rugged pocket computers loaded with GPS and GIS capabilities to record data, locations, and track our coverage of the island. Field data were analyzed daily, resulting in real-time analysis of progress made during the project.



3. WHAT IS THE BIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESTORATION PROJECT? By relocating feral cats, the partners helped protect rare and endangered species. San Nicolas Island’s native life—some found nowhere else in the world—was threatened by introduced feral cats, which preyed on endemic lizards and deer mice, as well as on nesting seabirds and other birds. Feral cats also directly competed with foxes for habitat and scarce resources.



4. WHAT COLLABORATIONS ENABLED THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT? This project was made possible with funding from the Montrose Settlement Restoration Program, which is dedicated to restoring natural resources harmed by DDTs and PCBs in the southern California marine environment.

