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Ovaries harvested from endangered wolf

Written by [Matt Dalen](#)
Tuesday, April 07, 2009

The Wolf Conservation Center has taken an unusual step in its quest to preserve the endangered Mexican gray wolf: a spaying. In February, the center took F516, an 11-year-old Mexican gray, to the Norwalk Veterinary Hospital, where she was spayed and her ovaries were harvested for the potential of future in vitro fertilization.

"This is the first time it's happened at our facility," said center curator Rebecca Bose. "It only happens in unique circumstances like this, where it is an older female, and they are valuable. This particular female is extremely valuable genetically."



Dr. Charles Duffy of the Norwalk


F516, who was born in captivity and came to the center from Sedgewick County Zoo in Kansas in 2006, had a two-pup litter last year, but both pups died shortly after birth. By comparison, a younger wolf at the center had a litter of six pups, which are still living at the center.

"It was an indicator that she wasn't capable of breeding any more," Ms. Bose said, although the operation would likely have been performed either way. In addition to harvesting the wolf's eggs, the operation will allow F516 to remain in her enclosure with her mate during breeding season. The operation went smoothly and lasted only about half an hour, Ms. Bose said.

After the operation, the ovaries were placed in a special container and rushed to the airport, which

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Veterinary Hospital removes the ovaries from the endangered Mexican gray wolf F516. took them to the St. Louis Zoo. At the zoo, 67 viable eggs were harvested, more than expected, and they will be frozen until in vitro fertilization of wolves is perfected, Ms. Bose said.

F516 had fully recovered from her operation within a day of the procedure, according to the center.

Wolf Conservation Center

The center, which was founded in 1999, has 23 Mexican gray wolves, none of which are breeding pairs, and one endangered red wolf. The red wolf had been part of a breeding pair, but after several unsuccessful breeding seasons, the male was sent to another facility, and the center is likely to get a new mate in the fall. The endangered wolves at the center, all of which are kept away from humans in wilderness enclosures, are part of species survival plans for the Mexican gray wolf and the red wolf.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, there were about 300 Mexican gray wolves in captivity around the U.S. and Mexico as of 2006, and significantly fewer than that in the wild. The wolf center has released two of its wolves to the wild, in New Mexico, in recent years, but both were shot and killed within months of their release.

The Mexican gray wolf is a subspecies of the gray wolf, and is listed separately from the gray wolf as critically endangered.

Information: nywolf.org.

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