

Mexican Gray Wolf Pup Fostering

The process of moving Mexican gray wolf puppies from one pack to be fostered by another is a precise and well-coordinated effort that is executed by dedicated staff from several organizations. The placing of the two wolf puppies born at Brookfield Zoo—M1471 (named Blaze) and F1472 (named Brooke)—in the Arizona-based Elk Horn Pack of wild wolves for fostering was successfully accomplished through a partnership among the Chicago Zoological Society (CZS), the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Mexican Gray Wolf Species Survival Plan, and the Interagency Field Team, which is made up of biologists from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the USDA Forest Service, the USDA Animal and Plant Health and Inspection Service—Wildlife Services, and the White Mountain Apache Tribe.

Canid species (wolves, foxes, and dogs) in general are known to be very accepting of fostering of pups if coordinated at a specific time in the development of the puppies and after maternal bonding is established, usually after five to seven days of life and before the puppies' eyes open.

Before fostering is attempted:

- It is essential to select the appropriate wolf pack the pups will be fostered in. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Mexican Gray Wolf Species Survival Plan coordinator and behavioral specialist consult with USFWS regarding both the wild-born and zoo-born litters. They review all the possible pups and select the ones that show promise to improve the genetic diversity of the wild wolf population. It is best if the puppies in both litters are born within six days of each other.
- It is preferred that the donor mother and receiving mother are experienced and have had previous successful litters.
- The donating litter also needs to be large enough to provide pups for fostering in a wild pack.

Timeline

- Chicago Zoological Society staff tracked when the alpha pair at Brookfield Zoo—Zana (known as F1265) and Flint (identified as M1195)—bred and reported possible due dates to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Brookfield Zoo was one of several institutions selected from the managed Mexican gray wolf breeding population to provide pups for fostering.
- Within 48 hours after puppies were born on April 25, CZS staff reported the number of individuals in the litter to USFWS.
- Members of the Interagency Field Team identified the Elk Horn Pack as a compatible pack.
- In the early morning hours of April 30, animal care and veterinary staff found the den site at Brookfield Zoo and evaluated all the pups. The two largest and most vigorous puppies in the litter were selected for the fostering program. The remaining three puppies were placed back in the den. Zana returned to the den site to care for the puppies.
- Blaze and Brooke were taken to the zoo's Animal Hospital for complete neonatal examinations.
- An animal care and veterinary staff team of two accompanied the puppies on the flight to Arizona. During the trip, the pups were kept warm and received supplemental feedings every several hours.
- While the puppies were en route from Brookfield Zoo, the Interagency Field Team arrived in the area of the Elk Horn Pack to locate its den site and check on activity. The adults are collared and are located using radio telemetry. The collars on the wolves send out a signal that the biologists can locate using an antenna.
- To ensure a successful fostering, it is important that the puppies in the wild litter and the ones being fostered have the same scent. At the den site, biologists removed the Elk Horn Pack puppies and rubbed them with the same puppy milk formula that Blaze and Brooke received. They also rubbed hair and debris from the den site onto Blaze and Brooke. In addition, feces and urine from all the puppies

were rubbed on all of them. Once this was complete, the team placed all the puppies, including Blaze and Brooke, in the den.

- Since the introduction of Blaze and Brooke to the Elk Horn Pack, the adult female has returned to the puppies and has moved the den site a short distance away from the original one, which is not unusual.
- The Interagency Field Team will be providing the pack with supplemental feed of meat and road-killed elk to offer the best chance that they raise the litter successfully.
- Remote cameras will be placed in the area to attempt to document the survival of all pups. This information may indicate that Blaze and Brooke are alive, if seven pups are documented in the picture. In addition, the Interagency Field Team will attempt to capture puppies from the Elk Horn Pack when they are approximately 3 to 4 months old and during end of the year helicopter count and capture operations. If Blaze or Brooke are captured, they will be radio-collared and monitored.