



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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RARE MEXICAN WOLVES BREED, PRODUCE PUPS IN CAPTIVITY FOR THE FIRST TIME

After several unsuccessful attempts, the highly endangered Mexican wolf has been bred in captivity for the first time, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today, giving hope to U.S. and Mexican wildlife officials in their joint effort to save the species from extinction.

The only female in captivity and possibly the last hope for saving the species, produced a litter of four pups May 20 at the Wild Canid Survival and Research Center in St. Louis.

Wildlife biologists were especially pleased that three of the pups are females. As a precautionary measure against catastrophe, two have been moved to the St. Louis Zoological Park, which has special facilities and experienced personnel for caring for young animals. The other two pups are being cared for by the mother in her isolated den. Service officials hope that the females, along with the six males already in captivity at the Sonoran Desert Museum near Tucson, AZ, can form the nucleus of a captive breeding program.

The adult female and her mate were transferred from the Arizona facility last year to the Wild Canid Survival and Research Center in hopes that the large, secluded habitat there would be more conducive to breeding, which had been unsuccessful with two other mates in 1979 and 1980.

The Mexican wolf, a subspecies of the gray wolf that occurs in the U.S. and Canada, is rapidly nearing extinction in Mexico with fewer than 50 of the elusive animals scattered over remote areas of that country. The Fish and Wildlife Service and Mexico's Direccion General de la Fauna Silvestre began a cooperative effort to save the species in 1975, including captive breeding which was stalled until 1978 when the female was captured. She was pregnant when captured but only the males in the litter survived. Biologists have been unable to locate another female in the wild, giving added importance to the arrival of the three "she"-pups in captivity.