



SF Zoo & Gardens Mourns Loss of Geriatric Mexican Gray Wolf

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — May 5, 2021 — “Garcia,” one of three 15-year-old Mexican gray wolves brought to the San Francisco Zoo & Gardens as part of a collaborative conservation effort, passed away yesterday. The geriatric male canid recently experienced a decline in quality of life and was being treated for a number of age-related conditions. Mexican gray wolves typically live up to 13 years in the wild and have been known to live up to 15 years at zoos.

“We are saddened by the loss of Garcia whose arrival here represented a turning point in the conservation of Mexican gray wolves,” said Tanya M. Peterson, CEO and Executive Director of San Francisco Zoological Society. “By introducing this endangered species to our guests to observe, the story of this species’ near extinction and its road to recovery is such an important one to tell. And thanks to the creativity of one of our major donors who named the three wolves after her favorite rock stars, the fact that they were named Bowie, Prince and Garcia added to their mystique and popularity!”

The Mexican gray wolf, also known as “El Lobo” or the “Lobo,” is the most endangered wolf subspecies (and is a subspecies of the gray wolf). Though they were once abundant throughout Mexico and the Southwestern United States preying on native elk and deer, Mexican gray wolves were nearly fully extirpated by the 1970s from livestock ranchers, hunting, trapping and poisoning. When the population went down to only five individual wolves, putting the species at high risk for extinction, zoos were able to offer a hand to help save the species. In 1976, Mexican gray wolves were designated as an endangered species. From the five rescued wolves bred in captivity, 11 wolves were subsequently released into a protected small pocket of Arizona and New Mexico. Those 11 wolves are currently responsible for repopulating the approximate 186 that now live in the wild and about another 220 wolves in managed care like the ones at SF Zoo & Gardens.

In 2016, the three 11-year-old male siblings, including “Bowie” and “Prince,” born in April 2006 at the Wildlife West Nature Park in New Mexico, were placed at SF Zoo. The placement was part of a collaborative Association of Zoo & Aquarium (AZA) Mexican Gray Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) and the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program led by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The goal of the SSP is to strategically grow the population and ultimately release viable candidates into the Mexican Wolf Recovery Area. While this trio were not eligible for release, Garcia, along with his siblings, have been part of an on-going health studies and inclusion in assisted reproductive efforts for the purpose of cryo-preservation of sperm for genome banking of mature wolves.

According to Garcia’s long-time caretakers, Garcia was uncharacteristically bold, curious and playful for a Mexican gray wolf, which made him a fan favorite by both visitors and staff. And,

along with his siblings, they were engaging and active with the visiting public, who could view the animals up-close through large viewing windows in the Wolf Canyon habitat.

“Garcia was a wonderful ambassador for his wild counterparts,” added Tanya Peterson, “and was valuable in educating countless people about misconceptions surrounding wolves. He was beloved by so many and will be missed greatly.”

About San Francisco Zoo & Gardens

Established in 1929, San Francisco Zoo & Gardens connects people to wildlife, inspires caring for nature and advances conservation action. An urban oasis, the Zoo & Gardens is home to more than 2,000 exotic, endangered and rescued animals representing more than 250 species as well as seven distinct gardens full of native and unusual plants. Located at the edge of the Pacific Ocean where the Great Highway meets Sloat Boulevard. Guests to SF Zoo & Gardens must follow mandated safety procedures when visiting at this time due to COVID-19. Visit www.sfzoo.org for more information.



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