

## Seven San Nicolas Island Cats Rescued

**Humane Society of the United States helps transport cats from the wild to a California sanctuary.**

Posted: May 1, 2009, 3 a.m. EDT

Shelly Dell, registered veterinary technician, cares for one of the San Nicolas Island feral cats. Photo by Richard G. Johnson, DVM, Animal Medical Center.

The bleak terrain of San Nicolas Island, where the feral cats came from. Photo by David Pauli. Sheldon, an orange tabby born in the wild, is one of seven feral cats who have been rescued from San Nicolas Island, off the Southern California coast, where plans are in place to eradicate the feline population to preserve the native species.

These seven island cats have been spayed/neutered, vaccinated and checked by a veterinarian and are now living at a sanctuary north of Los Angeles. Getting these cats off the Navy-owned island and taking them to an approved facility was part of a deal between the U.S. government and the Humane Society of the United States.

Nancy Peterson, cat programs manager for the HSUS, said that any cats who are found to be in good health will be allowed to be transported to a place that includes a secure enclosure, where the cats can't harm other animals or be harmed themselves.

An estimated 100-200 cats live on San Nicolas Island, which is about 60 miles off the Southern California coast and provides nesting habitat for numerous native seabirds and shorebirds, as well as other threatened species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife service had determined the feral cats were to be trapped and euthanized to help restore the native wildlife.

In a recent compromise, the HSUS, along with the Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Navy, decided to give any healthy feral cats a second chance. Capturing the cats and flying them off the island to a secure sanctuary is the only way to both save them and to save the native wildlife, Peterson said.

It was either get them off the island or they would be euthanized on the island, she said. Trap-Neuter-Return — which is a practice the HSUS supports — was not an option in this case because the sterilized cats would then continue to prey on the native species, she said.

The seven cats who have been rescued so far are “in quite good condition,” Peterson said. They include five males and two females who are about a year old and weigh from 3 to 9 pounds.

They'll live out their lives at CARE Sanctuary in Little Rock, Calif., where they have access to an enclosed outdoor area. The feral cats have been interacting with people for the first time and have become affectionate with the caretakers, Peterson said.