

## **Santa Barbara News-Press**

# **Activists target plan to kill turkeys on Santa Cruz Island**

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Activists who tried to stop feral pigs being killed on Santa Cruz Island have filed suit in an attempt to save wild turkeys living there.

The Nature Conservancy, which owns most of the island, said last month that turkeys are being killed because they're endangering rare Santa Cruz Island foxes, which exist nowhere else in the world.

At least 250 turkeys have been shot out of a population estimated at 300. Conservancy officials have said the goal of the project is not to eradicate but to control the birds, which are the descendants of turkeys introduced by a rancher in 1972.

News of the turkey killing appalled some activists, who fought to stop the pig eradication project on Santa Cruz Island, which is part of Channel Islands National Park.

"We think these people are just out of control and we think it has to be stopped," said Santa Barbara businessman Rick Feldman.

He and the nonprofit group In Defense of Animals, based in Mill Valley, are plaintiffs in a suit filed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles. They want the turkey killing to be halted and The Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service, which manages the rest of the island, to be required to prepare an environmental impact study on the turkey hunting program.

"There's no oversight," claimed Elliot Katz, a veterinarian who founded In Defense of Animals. "They're just running out slaughtering animals."

Misty Herrin, a spokeswoman for The Nature Conservancy, declined to comment on the matter because it's the subject of a lawsuit.

Park service spokeswoman Yvonne Menard said Wednesday that the agency hadn't received a copy of the lawsuit so she couldn't comment specifically on it. However, she said, "there have been no turkeys killed on park service land." The flock spends most of its time on The Nature Conservancy's portion of Santa Cruz Island.

The turkeys are being shot by the same professional hunters who have almost finished eradicating thousands of pigs on the island, a multimillion-dollar project jointly funded by the conservancy and the park service. The hunters are targeting turkeys at no extra cost, conservancy officials have said.

The rationale for killing the birds is the same as that for getting rid of the pigs. Both animals provide prey for golden eagles, conservancy officials say, attracting the birds to the island, where they also prey on endangered foxes.

The pigs had kept turkey populations in check by eating their eggs and competing with them for food. With nearly all the pigs gone, the turkey population has boomed, according to The Nature Conservancy. The birds also eat the acorns of native oak trees and spread introduced plants, they say.

Mr. Feldman said Wednesday he believes the rationale for getting rid of the turkeys is nonsense.

"It appears to us that the solution for the National Park Service and the conservancy to everything is to kill things," he said. "What's

the next thing they're going to say needs to be killed now that they're doing the turkeys?"

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