

Distemper Outbreak in Gray Foxes Monrovia

December 2007

An outbreak of Distemper virus in gray foxes was reported to Veterinary Public Health by the staff at the Monrovia Animal Control Department.

Between the last week of August 2007 and December 17, 2007, Monrovia Animal Control received reports of 11 dead or severely ill foxes. One fox found alive showed bizarre behavior, including repeated efforts to enter homes. A second fox found alive initially had a fever, depression, muscle spasms, and “knuckling over” of the back paws. The last fox to be found dead had heavy green eye discharge. One raccoon was also found dead in this time period, and may also have died from Distemper virus.

The California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory in San Bernardino performed a complete necropsy. A rabies test was conducted first, since the animal had neurological symptoms, and was found to be negative. Further testing then revealed evidence of Distemper virus in the brain and lungs.

Foxes may be drawn to populated areas, and can be very persistent in their efforts to get to food. Easily accessible food, such as pet food left outdoors, may encourage a fox to frequently visit a property (even if there is a risk of a confrontation with a dog). A fox may contaminate food bowls with Distemper virus and pass the virus to dogs. Or a fox may catch the virus from a sick dog through contact with contaminated food bowls and surfaces.

This is a good reminder to keep all pet food indoors and to make sure all dogs are properly vaccinated against Distemper.

