



Fox in Median

One morning, Tonto National Forest engineer Darryl San Souci was on his way from his Phoenix office to an inspection site in Young. While traveling north along highway 87, he spotted a gray fox lying near the median of the road, just over the Sunflower Pass. He appeared to be dead, probably hit by a vehicle. However, as Darryl drove past him, the fox looked directly at him. He was very much alive! Darryl said, “He looked at me as if he was pleading for help! A strange feeling came over me, the feeling that I needed to rescue that animal.”

Darryl looked in his rear view mirror. Traffic was extremely heavy and there really was no place for him to stop or pull over. He proceeded on to Young to make his appointment with the contractor. But he couldn’t stop thinking about that helpless fox along the highway.

After concluding his obligations at the job site, he proceeded back to Phoenix. As he approached the pass, he could see that the fox was still there but appeared to be dead. Wanting to be sure that was really the case without putting himself in danger, he whistled. “To my complete surprise, the fox lifted his head, extended his front paws, as if he was attempting to get up, like a cat does while it’s sleeping. I immediately knew I could not allow this animal to suffer any more. It was fate that this animal was going to live.”

Knowing that he could get cell service at the top of the pass, he proceeded on. From the pass, he called the Arizona Humane Society, who directed him to call Southwest Wildlife. Southwest Wildlife got the call about 2:30 p.m. They immediately dispatched a trained rescue volunteer and asked Darryl if he could please wait, to direct the volunteer to the fox’s location. Darryl answered, “No problem.”

After getting underway to rescue the fox, Southwest Wildlife volunteer Dave Furnish called Darryl. Darryl explained to Dave that because there wasn’t any safe place to park on the hill, he was going to go down, park, and hike back up (about 1 ½ miles!) to the fox’s location. Dave described his vehicle to Darryl, who would wave when he saw Dave coming.

About 45 minutes later, Dave saw Darryl hanging over the guardrail and frantically waving at him. He slowed down, looking for the fox and for a place to get off the road. He couldn’t find either. He finally stopped as close to the guardrail as he could get. But he was still not completely off the highway.

He rolled down his window and asked Darryl where the fox was. Darryl pointed and said, “Out there.”

Dave looked out across two lanes of heavy, 70-miles-per-hour traffic. Next to the concrete median barrier lay the fox.

Dave was extremely surprised at the fox’s situation. In most cases such as this, animals’ instincts tell them to get to safety, even if they have to drag themselves along the ground to do so. This sometimes means that injured animals are never seen and, therefore, not rescued. More commonly, this means that the animal is hit again and doesn’t survive. This fox, however, seemed almost calm.

Dave waited for a break in traffic so he could open his door, get out, and run around to the back of his vehicle. There, he took out a crate, put on gloves, and grabbed a towel. After waiting for another break in the traffic, Dave ran across the two lanes of the highway to the fox. As cars and trucks whizzed by him at 70 miles per hour, close enough to reach out and touch, it occurred to Dave how dangerous the situation was and how passing motorists must certainly be wondering what that crazy man was doing in the median.

As Dave leaned down to cover him with the towel so he could safely pick him up and carry him back to the crate, the fox stood up! Dave’s greatest concern, in that instant, was that the fox would run into oncoming traffic. He backed off. He decided that the safest way to proceed, for both the fox and him, was with a catchpole. That meant that he’d have to dart through the traffic to get to his truck, where the catchpole was, and back again.

Dave easily got the catchpole’s snare around the fox’s neck but couldn’t get a leg into it. Given the dangerous situation they were both in, he decided to go ahead like that. At the next break in the traffic, he would use the pole as if it were a leash and walk the fox across the highway.

Well that fox took about four steps, decided that he had had all the fun he wanted for one day, and put on the breaks. Dave took a quick look uphill at the oncoming traffic. He lifted the snare end of the pole—fox and all—into the air and ran!

They made it to the truck unscathed. Dave put the fox into the crate and removed the snare. As the men loaded the crate into the truck, they were both struck by the same impression: the fox was still calm and actually looked relieved!

Dave gave Darryl a ride down the hill to his vehicle, then headed straight to Sonoran Veterinary Hospital, where staff was waiting to assess the fox’s medical condition. As it turned out, he was not badly injured. He had probably been hit in the head and knocked a little crazy—like that guy motorists saw in the median near Sunflower Pass earlier that afternoon.

He (the fox) recuperated at Southwest Wildlife and was released. Dave’s sanity, however, continues to be in question.

Darryl later said, “I felt really thankful that I was able to do something helpful for a wild animal in such need. It probably would have been normal to put the animal out of my mind, like so many other motorists probably did. But after reflecting back, I just couldn’t allow the fox to die without trying to do something. Sometimes it’s really easy and doesn’t take much effort to care and help out some of our wonderful forest resources.

“I also felt very appreciative that there are people like [Southwest Wildlife], that really do care about the well being of our wildlife throughout Arizona. I really want to thank you for everything that you and your volunteer group do to save our wonderful wild animals. I would do this task again and again to help save an animal which really has no other way to help itself.”

One thing is certain: Southwest Wildlife could not achieve its goal without compassionate people such as Dave and Darryl, and the financial support of people like you.