

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SAN CLEMENTE ISLAND WILDLIFE PROPOSED FOR ENDANGERED LIST

San Clemente Island's animals are in trouble. Seven species have been proposed for listing as endangered by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Associate Director Keith M. Schreiner announced today.

The proposal, published recently in the Federal Register, identifies three snails, two birds, one beetle, and a lizard as species that appear to be threatened with extinction on the U.S. Navy-owned island off the southern California coast. Interested persons have until August 2, 1976, to comment.

San Clemente Island is viewed by some scientists as similar to the Galapagos Islands west of South America, where life forms evolved independently from those on the mainland. Unlike the seven other islands off the southern California coast which were once connected to the mainland during the ice age, San Clemente is a true ocean island. Many of its species do not occur anywhere else. Due to its isolation it is considered the most biologically distinctive coastal island owned by the United States.

Its wildlife has been studied by scientists for over 100 years, but only within the last 10 years has it been studied intensively. The island presents an unusual opportunity for the study of evolution and speciation. However, man has severely modified the habitat upon which many of these species are dependent. Animals that were introduced by man, especially

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goats, swine, and black-tailed deer, quickly denuded areas. Prior to their introduction, San Clemente was covered with native woodlands and sagebrush. Wooded areas are almost entirely absent now, and sagebrush occurs only in a few rugged, relatively inaccessible canyons. The removal of vegetation has also caused erosion of the top soil.

Unless precautions are taken, the extinction of these species is likely in the foreseeable future, as their population levels have become critically low due to competition from the introduced animals. Recently, the U.S. Navy has initiated a live-trapping program, and many of San Clemente's goats have been trapped and removed from the island. It is hoped that when removal of the goats is complete the native ecosystems on the island may recover.

The species proposed for endangered status are as follows: mollusks--wreathed island snail, horse-shoe snail, Gabb's snail; insects--San Clemente coenonycha; birds--San Clemente loggerhead shrike, San Clemente sage sparrow; reptiles--island night lizard (also found on Santa Barbara and San Nicholas Islands).

The Service has already sought the views of the Governor of California with regard to the status of all these species. Other interested persons are invited to submit written comments, suggestions, objections, or factual information which is relevant to this proposal to the Director (FWS/SE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. All comments received before August 2, 1976, will be considered.

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