



PRESS RELEASE – How a small wild animal refuge is coping during the COVID-19 outbreak
Bonsall, CA
April 20, 2020

We are all facing unprecedented challenges in these COVID-19 times, but a plucky small private wild animal refuge in Bonsall is determined to survive.

Wild Wonders houses 120 animals on its 5-acre spread in Bonsall, about 10 miles east of Oceanside just off Highway 76. From cheetahs to porcupines to tortoises to groundhogs, Wild Wonders is the forever home to a wide variety of animal ambassadors that educate the public about the importance of the role they play on the planet. Through education outreach programs, these creature teachers visit over 1,000 schools, libraries, churches, birthday parties and other venues each year. And hundreds of people visit the facility annually for private tours and Zoo Camps.



The stay-in-place and social distancing orders have dried up revenue. The well was dry when it came to receiving any money from the initial federal programs, and since Bonsall is in San Diego County, Wild Wonders was not eligible for the City funds announced by San Diego Mayor Faulconer.

Determined not to lay off staff and to keep them healthy, Wild Wonders divided their small team of keepers into two teams to avoid cross-contamination. The teams actually have MORE work to do because of additional precautions necessary when working with the cats and small primates. Staff now apply extra sanitization measures and wear filtered masks and gloves when working around these susceptible animals.

Deliveries for meat, produce, and even insects have become inconsistent and even more expensive. Carnivores like cheetahs and lynx cannot be switched to a diet of fruit and vegetables while waiting for their meat to arrive. Similarly, as people have found toilet paper supplies to be

hard to find and expensive when found, other everyday food items have skyrocketed in price. Mealworms (loved by hedgehogs and armadillos) and crickets (part of the standard diet for primates and cane toads) now cost 2-8 times as much, and their delivery times are unpredictable.



Jackie Navarro, who founded Wild Wonders in 1991, and her small team have weathered other storms before – from the great recession in 2008 to the recent Lilac Fire. “We’ve had to adjust to the distance learning trend by schools and libraries and are now offering virtual safaris with live and videotaped versions of our Education programs.”

Meanwhile, Jackie and her staff continue to apply for new loan programs as they are announced and are working hard to promote their virtual safaris. Their efforts are beginning to show some promise which is encouraging, but it’s a steep climb from \$50 videos to covering their \$20,000/month expenses for staff and animal care.

“We’ll get through this, but it feels like starting all over again,” says Jackie.

For more information about Wild Wonders, visit wildwonders.org.