

LEOH Trip

April 20, 2021

Saint Francis Wolf Sanctuary, Navasota



The Sanctuary is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing a home for non-releasable wolves and wolfdogs.

It is also dedicated to educating the public about these animals. It has been in existence for 13 years, but just recently moved to its new large and beautiful location.

Our tour began outside the Welcome Center, named for sanctuary founder Jean LeFevre.

Jean had learned of a wolf named Mystery, who escaped from a substandard sanctuary in Conroe.

Mystery had been mistreated there and was in very poor health.

After escaping, Mystery was shot and captured in a leg trap. Amazingly, she survived long enough for a local veterinarian to treat her.



But once Mystery was healed, where could she go?
Jean went to meet Mystery, and from that meeting the Sanctuary was born.

It opened on October 4, 2002, the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi – hence the sanctuary name.

Mystery lived a long and healthy life at the Sanctuary, passing away just after her 18th birthday.



Kayla Hardy, Sanctuary Keeper, served as our excellent tour guide. We quickly learned that each animal has its own story, but that most endured much misery before coming to the sanctuary. Many suffer from PTSD upon arrival, due to owners who had no idea what keeping a wolf would entail, or who purposely mistreated them. Owners do not realize that wolves and wolfdogs, by nature, will generally cause a great deal of damage to property – hence they end up chained outside. Or that they are strictly raw meat-eaters - hence they become malnourished from improper diet. The animals are generally given a new name upon arrival at the sanctuary, as one way to stop reminding them of any past trauma in their lives.

We enjoyed a pleasant, shaded walk by each enclosure, sitting at times on benches as Kayla told us each animal's story, along with details on their care in the sanctuary.

They never touch the animals directly, unless they have been sedated for veterinary care. They do give them back scratches through the enclosure, with an extended scratcher.

The animals are trained to perform certain "tricks", such as standing against the fencing (so they can receive a vaccination or sedation shot), or to stand up with their front paws on the fence (for certain examinations).

During the tour, Kayla made sure to give each animal their snack.

Finally!
Snack Time!
I'm
starving !

Hey!
Where's
Mine?



We learned that many times someone will call the sanctuary to say they have a wolf or wolfdog they need to rehome.

In almost all cases, the animal is really a dog, such as a malamute, that bears some resemblance to a wolf.

At other times, of course, the animal really is a wolf. Currently, the sanctuary does not have room to take another wolf or wolfdog; however, they will work with the owner to rehome it to another sanctuary.

There are very few legitimate wolf sanctuaries nationwide, so rehoming can be a challenge. Wolves and wolfdogs cannot be released into the wild, because a pack will not accept them.

At this time, there are 13 animals in the Sanctuary. One just happens to be a dog! DNA testing done on the animals confirms their ancestry. Dogs Romulus and Remus (brothers) started their lives raised together as wolves/wolfdogs under deplorable conditions. They were rescued and Remus was able to be adopted and become a family pet. Romulus was not suitable for a family atmosphere, but instead was quite happy to hang out with wolves and wolfdogs at the Sanctuary.

Sanctuary staff arrange occasional “playdates” among the animals, but also work to pair animals in enclosures who will get along and not fight (since one will always insist on being the alpha of the pair). Kayla was delighted to tell us that a kind of love story developed between Calypso, a female wolf, and Romulus. The two are quite happy and content to be in the same enclosure (all the animals are neutered/spayed). It’s just that mealtime means raw meat for Calypso, and regular dog food for Romulus. It also means that when the wolves are howling, Romulus will be barking!



The sanctuary Welcome Center also serves as a gift shop, with many nice items, some unusual. “Paintings” done by the wolves are an example. Above, you may note that the arctic fox Achilles has some blue and red paint near his face. Kayla told us Achilles really had a fun but accidental immersive experience while painting his masterpiece! (Yes, the paint will eventually fade away. He doesn’t seem to mind.)



The grounds are large and well cared for. Above, you can see the animal enclosures from the Welcome Center. There is also a nice pond, with a walkway and pavilion. The sanctuary's goal is to continue building more (and bigger) enclosures, so they can accept more animals, and to eventually have at least one very large enclosure to provide room for a group of wolves to enjoy as a pack.

Visitors can register for a daytime tour, or a nighttime "Howl Night" or "Camping with the Wolves".

There are many ways to donate to the sanctuary. Please go their website to find out how, and to find out more about these wonderful animals!

saintfranciswolfsanctuary.org



On our way back to Houston, we stopped at
Cisco's Grill/Cantina in Tomball
for a delicious lunch.

LEOH member Hanna Schwarz just happened to
be celebrating her birthday this day, so it was
fun to surprise Hanna during lunch
with a LEOH rendition (for better or worse)
of *Happy Birthday*.

Thanks, as always, goes to trip leader
Ann Fairchild for arranging another
fun and educational trip!

Thanks also to County Precinct 3 bus drivers
Chihung Lam (left) and Joseph Celestain,
who drove us safely and carefully
from place to place.

