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Puppy born from frozen embryo fetches good news

By Krishna Ramanujan

Meet Klondike, the Western Hemisphere's first puppy born from a frozen embryo. He's a beagle-Labrador retriever mix, and although neither of those breeds are endangered, Klondike's very existence is exciting news for endangered canids like the red wolf.

Now 9 months old, Klondike's beagle mother was fertilized using artificial insemination. Her embryos were collected and frozen until Klondike's surrogate mother, also a beagle, was ready to receive the embryo.

This frozen-embryo technique is one of many reproductive technologies that can be used to conserve such endangered species as wild canids. Conducted by researchers at Cornell's Baker Institute for Animal Health and the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, freezing such materials as fertilized eggs – cryopreservation – provides researchers with a tool to repopulate endangered species. Because dogs are able to sustain a pregnancy only once or twice a year, freezing canine embryos allows for coordinated timing of transfer into surrogates.

“Reproduction in dogs is remarkably different than in other mammals,” said Alex Travis, Baker faculty member and director of Cornell's campuswide Center for Wildlife Conservation. “We're working to understand these differences so we can tackle issues ranging from developing contraceptives to preserving the genetic diversity of endangered animals through assisted reproduction.”

This research is funded in part by the National Institutes of Health, Cornell's Baker Institute and the Smithsonian Institution, and is part of a new joint program to train scientists to solve real-world conservation problems.

Cornell's Baker Institute for Animal Health at the College of Veterinary Medicine is one of the oldest research centers dedicated to the study of veterinary infectious diseases, immunology, genetics and reproduction.



Jason Koski/University Photography
Klondike with owner Julie Jordan.

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STORY CONTACTS

Cornell Chronicle
Krishna Ramanujan
607-255-3290
ksr32@cornell.edu

Media Contact
Joe Schwartz
607-254-6235
bjs54@cornell.edu

