



News Release

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WILD BORN CALIFORNIA CONDOR CHICK TAKES FLIGHT *Rare Event is Only the Second Wild Condor Fledging in 14 Years*

The second California condor chick to fledge in the wild in California in more than 14 years has left its nest at the Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. The six-month old chick, "Number 412," left its nest for the first time October 22, flying approximately 15 feet and is continuing to make short flights near the nest site.

The 6-month-old condor continues to make short flights while remaining close to the nest site. At least one parent is nearby keeping a watchful eye on the young bird as it explores the surroundings. The parents will continue to care for the juvenile condor until it is approximately 18 months old.

The chick was hatched May 2 near the refuge, which is home to the Service's California Condor Recovery Program. It is the first chick to fledge in the wild in California since 2004, and the second since the federally-listed condors were reintroduced in 1992. This brings the total number of California condor chicks to fledge in the wild to seven. Five condor chicks have fledged in Arizona.

"This is a significant event; each time a condor chick fledges in the wild it brings us that much closer to the goal of the recovery of this great bird," said Steve Thompson, manager of the Service's California and Nevada Operations Office.

Within all release sites, only one other chick hatched this year, but died of unknown causes after two months.

"We want to acknowledge the hard work of our partners and volunteers in the success of this fledging. They put in long hours of nest monitoring and assisted us with health checks on this chick," said Marc Weitzel, Project Leader for Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Ventura County.

There are 128 condors now living in the wild in California, Arizona and Baja, Mexico and 156 in captivity at the Los Angeles Zoo, San Diego Wild Animal Park, the Oregon Zoo and the Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho. The goal of the California Condor Recovery Plan is to establish two geographically separate populations, one in California and the other in Arizona, each with 150 birds and at least 15 breeding pairs. The largest bird in North America, condors are scavengers that have soared over mountainous areas of California since prehistoric

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times, but their numbers plummeted in the 20th Century. Condor numbers declined in part due to loss of habitat and food and from shooting, lead poisoning and toxic substances used to poison predators. Condors were listed as an endangered species in 1967, under a law that pre-dated the existing Endangered Species Act. In 1982, the condor population reached its lowest level of 22 birds, prompting biologists to start collecting chicks and eggs for a captive breeding program. By late 1984, only 15 condors remained in the wild. After seven condors died in rapid succession, it was decided to bring the remaining birds in from the wild for the captive breeding program. In 1992, the Recovery Program began releasing California condors back into the wild.

The Service is the lead federal partner in a multi-agency partnership working to conserve the California condor. Other partners include the Los Padres National Forest, California Department of Fish and Game, and several private partners. Private organizations and institutions actively participate in the recovery program, contributing personnel, expertise, institutional support, and funding. California condor captive breeding programs are operated at San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park, Los Angeles Zoo, Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey, and the Oregon Zoo. Release programs in California are managed by the Ventana Wildlife Society in Big Sur, the National Park Service at Pinnacles National Monument and the Service at Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. In Arizona, the release program is managed by The Peregrine Fund, and the Baja release site by the Zoological Society of San Diego.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Digital photographs of this condor are available at <http://www.fws.gov/cno>.

More information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
and condors, is available on the Internet at: <http://www.fws.gov/hoppermountain/>