



## Young California Condor in Arizona Takes Flight

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Biologists from Grand Canyon National Park and The Peregrine Fund have confirmed the fledging of the first California Condor nestling in Arizona in perhaps over a century. The flight was observed at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 5. The chick jumped out looking like it wanted to land but there was nothing there. It ungracefully circled and landed 500 - 600 feet below its nest cave in a remote canyon. The California Condor was included on the first Federal Endangered Species List in 1967.

"It was spectacular!" stated Sophie Osborn, Field Manager for The Peregrine Fund. "It was not the graceful flight we had envisioned, more like a controlled fall and our hearts were in our throats as it dropped 500 to 600 feet below the nest cave. Minutes after the chick landed it started to explore its environment, tugging on a yucca plant and hopping from boulder to boulder. We waited and hoped so long for this to happen that being part of it was indescribable!" finished Osborn.

"Our biggest worry after the chick left the cave was how long it would take for the parents to find it," stated Chad Olson, Raptor Technician for the National Park Service. "Both parents were away from the area when the chick fledged. To our great relief, female 127 flew to the nest about two hours after the chick fledged, realized the chick was not in the nest cave, immediately found it, and dropped down to feed it. Since fledging is such a dangerous time for the chick it is tremendous to be past this and on to another exciting phase," finished Olson

The chick is healthy and alert to its surroundings. Biologists are planning to attach telemetry equipment and assess overall health issues. The bird will be closely monitored.

"A fledgling condor chick spreads its wings and flies into the wild, and not just the parents share in the pride. The partners who have worked for decades to rescue this species from the brink of extinction see it as a great cause for hope," said Interior Secretary Gale Norton.

"I have watched adult condors soaring above the spectacular beauty of the Grand Canyon. The birth and flight of this young condor creates optimism that condors will flourish in the Canyon for many generations to come," finished Norton.

Biologists first suspected that Condors 123 and 127 were incubating an egg in March 2003. Daily observations were made, with assistance from a group of "Nestwatch" volunteers. The parents became very attentive to the nest in early May. The existence of the chick was confirmed on August 18 after biologists made an arduous 24-mile hike in 100 degree heat down to below the nesting cave. Daily monitoring continued.

"We are very pleased about this new step in the recovery of the California Condor species," stated Joseph Alston, Superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park. "We are proud to be a part of this highly anticipated and monumental event for both the park and the Colorado Plateau. We look forward to working with our partners in order to ensure the well-being of this new arrival to the condor population and to ensure continued success in the program."

Three pairs of California Condors produced eggs in Arizona in 2003 (one in BLM's Vermilion Cliffs National Monument and two in Grand Canyon National Park). Two of the eggs did not hatch, which is not uncommon for California Condors during their early breeding years. In fact, this was the second egg laid by Condor 127 and the third laid by Condor 119. In California this year, one egg was laid and hatched in early May, but, unfortunately, the chick did not survive.

As Roger Taylor, Arizona Strip Field Manager for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) states, "We have been anxiously awaiting this bird's first flight. With the good condor viewing opportunities that are typically available along the Vermilion Cliffs, perhaps the public will have an opportunity to view the young condor this winter."

"The significance of the first wild-hatched condor in Arizona is tremendous. While captive-bred condors have exceeded our expectations, it is this chick and others like it in the future that ensure condor recovery in Arizona," says Arizona Game and Fish Director Duane Shroufe.

"The partners have watched this chick prepare to fledge with as much anticipation as any natural parent might," said H. Dale Hall, Southwest Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "We all wish the best for this fledgling and look forward to further successes."

The historic Arizona reintroduction is a joint project among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, The Peregrine Fund, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the Bureau of Land Management, Southern Utah's Coalition of Resources and Economics, and others. Funding for the project is being provided by The Peregrine Fund, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Peter Pfendler, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund Awards, Steve Martin/Natural Encounters, Grand Canyon National Park Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, Grand Canyon National Park, Kearney Alliance, Grand Canyon Trust, Patagonia, Turner Foundation, Globe Foundation, Earth Friends, Arizona Public Service, Wallace Research Foundation, Mattie Wattis Harris Foundation, Arizona Community Foundation, and Oracle Corporation Grand Canyon Conservation Fund, and others.

*Images and other information may be obtained from the following websites:*

*The Peregrine Fund: [www.peregrinefund.org/press/condor\\_chick\\_fledges\\_2003.html](http://www.peregrinefund.org/press/condor_chick_fledges_2003.html)*

*The Grand Canyon National Park Foundation: [www.gcnpf.org](http://www.gcnpf.org) ,*

*Grand Canyon National Park: [www.nps.gov/grca](http://www.nps.gov/grca)*

The California Condors are being released as a "non-essential/experimental population" under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act. Section 10(j) provides that the species can be released in an area without impacting current or future land use planning. However, in Grand Canyon National Park condors are provided full protection as federally protected threatened species. This authority has been spelled out further in an innovative agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local governments. This "Implementation Agreement" spells out a positive working relationship between the Federal government and the various local governments.

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