



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

Sept. 30, 2014

Contact

Susan Whaley, The Peregrine Fund, (208) 362-8274

Jeff Humphrey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (602) 242-0210, ext. 222

Lynda Lambert, Arizona Game and Fish Department, (623) 236-7203

Rachel Tueller, Bureau of Land Management, (435) 688-3303

Maureen Oltrogge, Grand Canyon National Park, (928) 638-7779

Mark Hadley, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, (801) 538-4737

David Hercher, Kaibab National Forest, (928) 643-8110

Fewer Condors Treated for Lead Exposure

Number drops to lowest level since 2005

How do you save an endangered California condor? Provide it with a clean and healthy food source.

That's exactly what hunters in Utah and Arizona have been trying to do over the past few years. And it looks like their voluntary efforts might be paying off.

The number of California condors treated for lead exposure in Utah and Arizona recently dropped to its lowest level since 2005. Between Sept. 1, 2013 and Aug. 31, 2014, a total of 13 condors were treated to counter the effects of lead poisoning. During the same period the previous year, 28 birds were treated. The average over five years had been 26 condors annually.

"This is potentially exciting news," says Chris Parish, project director with The Peregrine Fund. "We're hopeful that the decreased measurements of lead exposure are a direct result of the hunters' actions. With continued effort, we may well see a continuing trend of lower lead levels in coming years."

Keith Day, a regional wildlife biologist with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), says condors feed entirely on carrion [dead animals].

"When they eat an animal that died after being wounded by a gunshot," he says, "or they eat the entrails left in the field after a hunter has cleaned an animal he or she has harvested, they ingest lead fragments. If hunters use non-lead ammunition, the threat of lead exposure is non-existent."

(more)

To help the endangered condors, the UDWR and the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) have asked hunters in southern Utah and northern Arizona to use non-lead ammunition. To offset the cost and encourage participation, both agencies have voluntary programs that provide hunters in those areas with a free box of non-lead bullets.

The voluntary response from hunters has been impressive.

“We’ve operated a lead reduction program in Arizona since 2005,” says Allen Zufelt, condor recovery biologist for the AGFD. “Over the past seven years, more than 80 percent of our hunters have chosen to use non-lead ammunition annually in support of the condor program. Many others have removed entrails, which might have lead fragments in them, from the field after a successful hunt.”

Utah’s non-lead program started in 2010. Having a comparable program in Utah may have tipped the scale in favor of the condors.

Day says 55 percent of those who hunted in the Zion hunting unit (where Utah’s non-lead program is focused) in 2013 used non-lead ammunition or removed entrails from the field if they used lead bullets. “We anticipate that the number of hunters who participate in the program on the Zion unit will continue to grow,” he says.

Utah hunters can learn more about the state’s lead reduction program—including prizes they can win for participating—at http://wildlife.utah.gov/condors/drawing_2014.pdf.

“Hats off to hunters in both states,” says Greg Sheehan, director of the UDWR. “We’re asking hunters to change a tradition and try something different for the sake of conservation. And they’re stepping to the plate. This type of cooperation is what makes successful wildlife management happen.”

Day and Zufelt say voluntary non-lead programs will continue in Utah and Arizona this fall.

The California condor recovery effort in Utah and Arizona is a cooperative program among federal, state and private partners. Those partners include The Peregrine Fund, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Arizona Strip Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management, Grand Canyon and Zion national parks, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and the Kaibab and Dixie national forests.

###