United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
HOPPER MOUNTAIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX
CALIFORNIA CONDOR RECOVERY PROGRAM
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California Condor Recovery Program

Annual Reporting for Calendar Year 2015 as of December 31, 2015

Total Population	**435**
Wild Population	**268**
California	**155**
{Southern CA	78
{Central CA	77
Arizona /Utah	**80**
Baja, Mex.	**33**
Captive Population	**167**

(Includes pre-release birds)

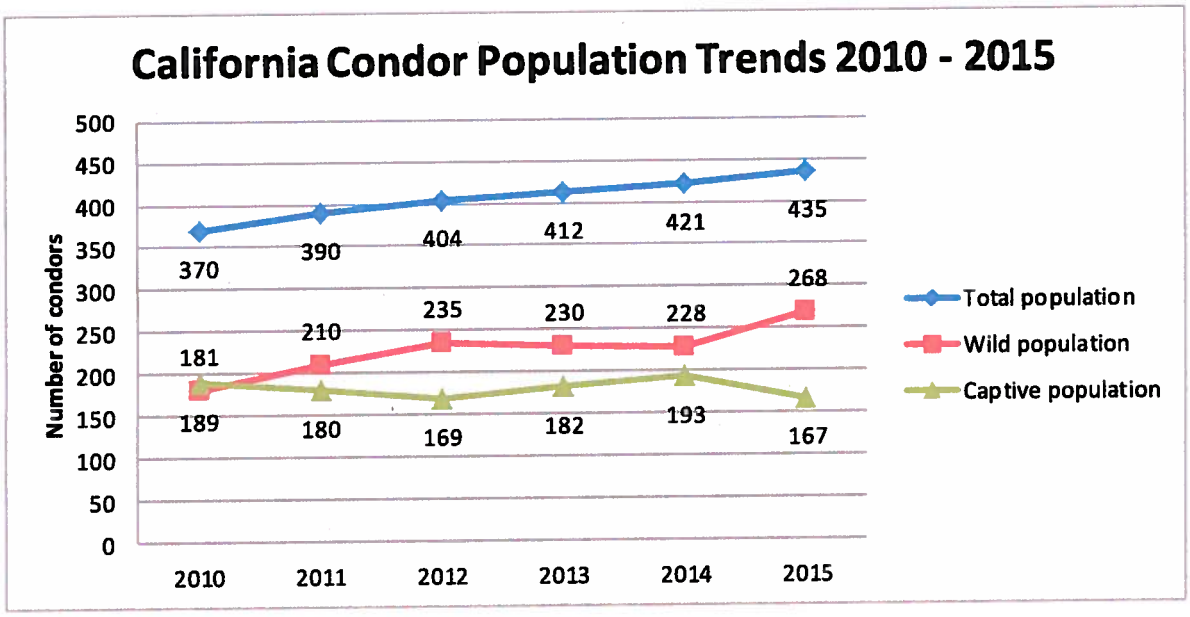
Total number of nests in the wild	**27**
Arizona / Utah	3
California	19
{SoCal – 10	
{VWS –6	
{PNP – 3	
Baja	5

Total number of wild-fledged chicks	**14**
Arizona /Utah	3
California	10
{SoCal – 5	
{VWS – 4	
{PNP – 1	
Baja	1

Total number of birds newly released to the wild	**38**
Arizona	10
California	22
{SoCal – 11 (10 pre-release + 1 captive adult)	
{VWS – 5 (2013 Baja cohort)	
{PNP – 7 (2014 cohort)	
Baja (2012 cohort)	6

Eggs produced in captivity	**34**
Fertile eggs produced in captivity	**23**
Fertile eggs transferred to wild nests	**4**
Fertile eggs hatched in captivity	**18**
2015 mortalities in the free-flying population	**12**
California	**7**
{Southern CA - 4	
{Central CA - 3	
Arizona/Utah	**4**
Baja, Mex.	**1**
Pending final necropsy for 2015	4
Confirmed Lead toxicosis to date for 2015	2
Confirmed trauma predation 2015	0
Unknown missing in wild/unrecovered 2015	5
Undetermined 2015	1
Total Confirmed Lead mortalities to date since 1984	**67**

Chick mortalities	**5**
Wild hatched chicks	5
Lead toxicosis	1
Euthenasia	1
Unknown missing	2
Undetermined	1
Mortalities in captive population	**2**
Euthanasia (poor health) (adult)	1
Undetermined (pre-release captive)	1



Summary

The total world population of California condors increased by 3.3 percent from 421 at the end of 2014, to 435 the end of 2015. The wild population (CA, AZ/UT and Baja, Mex.) increased by 17.5 percent from 228 to 268. The wild population in California reached 155 individuals by the end of 2015. This is an important milestone in the Recovery Program as it is the first time that one of the spatially disjunct, wild condor populations identified in the Recovery Plan (Service 1996) reached the *numerical* recovery goal of 150 free-flying birds in the wild.

In 2015, 14 wild-fledged birds represented 27 percent of the birds added to the wild population, while released captive-bred birds represented 73 percent. In comparison, 22 birds were added to the wild population in 2014; 15 released captive-bred (68 percent) and 7 wild fledged (31 percent).

The number of estimated nesting attempts in the wild (n=27) exceeded all previous records, (both pre and post extirpation of the California condor from the wild in 1983). Where accessible nests were known to have failed during the egg stage, an artificial egg was placed in the nest to ensure the pair did not abandon the nest. Prior to piping, a viable egg from the captive breeding program was then placed in the nest just prior to hatching. At the end of the 2015 nesting season there were twice the number of wild-fledged condors (n=14) than there were in at the end 2014 (n=7).

Mortality in the wild free flying population was 59 percent lower in 2015 (n=12) than in 2014 (n=29). Where a condor carcass was recovered from the wild in 2015 and analyzed for cause of death, final necropsy reports for 4 of 7 deaths in the free flying population are still pending.

2015 was the first year in the history of Recovery Program that the number of wild-fledged birds (n=14) exceeded the number of deaths in the free-flying population (n=12).

To date, two confirmed lead poisoning deaths were documented in the wild free flying population. One wild chick (pre-fledge) was also confirmed to have died as a result of lead poisoning. This was the first confirmed case of a wild chick mortality caused by lead poisoning.

In addition to the release of 37 captive-bred condors, one of the original wild condors (AC-4 or Studbook #20) was released back into the wild at the end of 2015, after 30 years in captivity as part of the captive breeding program. By 1987 all remaining wild condors had been brought into captivity in an effort to save the species from extinction and preserve the gene pool for use in a captive breeding program.

In order to maintain as much genetic diversity in the population as possible, the Recovery Program recently re-paired a number of the most genetically valuable breeding birds in the captive population (e.g. those individuals who are the least related to the rest of the captive population). Recent genetic analysis of the condor population determined AC-4 is well represented genetically across all captive and wild portions of the population and therefore he was removed from his role as breeder.

Despite the relative success the California Condor Recovery Program experienced in 2015, it is important to note that exposure to lead, thin-shelled eggs, micro-trash and other threats continued to require substantial management efforts, both in the field and in captivity. Without a sustained effort from the field programs, captive population staff, non-lead outreach coordinators, volunteers and other partners who continue to support the recovery effort, these results would not be possible.