



**United States of America
Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Endangered Species Program**

Telephonic Interview Time (6)

Topic: Condor Watch (Host – Dave Harrelson with Dr. Myra Finkelstein)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by USFWS Endangered Species Program

BEGIN INTERVIEW

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Dave Harrelson: Here to talk with us today is Dr. Myra Finkelstein, the Associate Professor of Environmental Toxicology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. A question for you: we've done some podcast's before, talking about California condors, for example, with San Diego Zoo with their rearing program, and lead poisoning has been mentioned as one of the problems that's impacting the recovery of these species in the wild. What's the situation with lead? Where's it coming from, and how does it affect the condors?

Dr. Finkelstein: Well, our research has shown that the principle source of lead poisoning to condors is lead based ammunition, so basically, condors are scavengers, and when they go to eat – find a carcass to eat for lunch, if that carcass had been also shot with lead based ammunition, they inadvertently, or accidentally, ingest some pieces of ammunition, which, unfortunately, can poison and kill them.

Dave Harrelson: When birds are found to be affected by lead, what's the treatment? I've heard of a process called chelation. Could you explain what that is?

Dr. Finkelstein: Yes, of course, so when we find a bird that's exhibiting symptoms of lead poisoning, so it's acting lethargic, it can't stand, it can't fly, what they'll do is they'll do a blood test on the bird, and if it comes up high, they'll send the zoo to a treatment facility where the bird will get supportive care, fluids, and other things to keep the bird alive, but it'll also receive

something called chelation therapy, and chelation therapy are basically just chemical drugs that they give to the bird that will help bind to the lead and draw the lead out of the bird's system, and it's what we use for treating human lead poisoning, as well. The problem is, is it's pretty hard on you, so not only does chelation drugs bind to the lead, it also binds to good things the bird needs, so it requires intensive management and monitoring, and simply trying to get rid of the lead, but put back the things the bird needs that the chelation therapy's also drawing out.

Dave Harrelson: Given this problem, you, and several partners, are involved in a very interesting project called Condor Watch. Can you, please, tell us a little bit about that?

Dr. Finkelstein: Yeah. I'm really excited about Condor Watch. Condors – so, condors are trapped on a regular basis to do the monitoring, to test them for lead poisoning, and also, to check their wing tags, and their transmitters, and one of the ways that the condor biologists are able to track them on a regular basis is that they feed them. They have these feeding stations, so there's several feeding stations throughout California that, basically, the condors come to, and they get a free meal, and if they have to trap them, that's where the biologist can trap them, but one of the side benefits of this is at these feeding stations they are taking thousands and thousands of photos of these condors sitting around and having lunch with their friends, and we realized that there's just an amazing opportunity to utilize all these feeding station photos, there's currently – we have about 175,000 of them, to understand which condors are hanging out with who else, and whether or not who they hang out with is influencing their risk of lead poisoning, or other kind of behaviors that are bad for them, so what we did is we wrote a grant application to Zooniverse, which is this organization that's affiliated with the citizen science, so I asked, and they accepted our project and developed a website, so we could tap into all citizen science out there in the world, and help us analyze this hundred thousand plus feeding station photos of condors.

Dave Harrelson: So, the participation in the project, it's not restricted to people living in California, or where condors are, particularly?

Dr. Finkelstein: No. No, Zooniverse has people, because they have multiple citizen science projects that are participating worldwide, and we've had people from Belgium, and the UK, and all – basically, all over the world participate in Condor Watch, and it's a great way to just get the word out there, get people to learn about condors, and appreciate condors, but also, to help solve this really, potentially, you know or problematic issue for condors and other species that are affected by lead.

Dave Harrelson: This sounds like it'd be a great project for teachers and their students?

Dr. Finkelstein: Yes, so there's a link. If you go to the Condor Watch page, there's a tab in the upper right corner that says – you know for educators, and so, educators can click on that and get access to other links and materials that they can use for their classrooms, and if any teacher, or educator, would like to contact us directly, we'd be more than happy to help provide additional materials, because we think it'd be really fun to use in the classroom.

Dave Harrelson: And this is Condor Watch, which is at www.condorwatch.org. Would you care to give a shout out to your – some of your other partners, because in looking at the website myself, I saw there were quite a few folks that you were involved with?

Dr. Finkelstein: Yes, so the California Condor Recovery Program is full of lots of amazing organization and people, you know within that organization, that work with condors, and we'd really like to thank our partners with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, California Condor Recovery Program, as well as partners with the National Park Service, with Pinnacles National Park, and then, Ventana Wildlife Society, the Nature Conservancy, and Santa Barbara Zoo, and the LA Zoo, and of course, Zooniverse for accepting our grant, and launching, and helping to run and maintain Condor Watch.

Dave Harrelson: Well, California condors, still a critically endangered species, and it could certainly use help, and this is a great opportunity for people to become involved in citizen science, so I wish you the very best of luck with it.

Dr. Finkelstein: Well, thank you very much. It's a pleasure to talk with you, and yes, just check out Condor Watch **[inaudible]**.

Dave Harrelson: All right. For the US Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Dave Harrelson. Thank you, Myra, so much for taking the time to talk to us.

Dr. Finkelstein: No, thank you very much, Dave.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 6 minutes