

Wild Condor Mark Milestone

Seven wild California condor chicks left their nests in California in 2008 — marking a successful breeding season, with the wild population now outnumbering the condors in captivity for the first time since the birds started being reintroduced in 1992. More than 80 condors are flying free in the wild in California.

More than 320 California condors exist in the world today -- a remarkable turnaround from 1982, when the total population reached a low of just 22 wild birds.

Beginning in 1992, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began reintroducing captive-bred condors to the wild. The goal of the California Condor Recovery Plan is to establish three distinct populations, each with at least 150 birds and 15 breeding pairs. Today, there are 167 condors flying in the wild, and 160 are in captivity as part of the breeding program. Due to its role as manager of the multi-agency Recovery Program, Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in California plays an integral part in the condors' lives, providing foraging and roosting habitat,

The California condor is the largest bird in North America, weighing as much as 25 pounds. California condors are scavengers, eating carcasses they find during long soaring flights using their more than nine-foot wing span.

The California condor was put on the federal Endangered Species List in 1968. Threats to the condor's survival include lead poisoning from spent ammunition, collisions with power lines, and accidental and intentional shooting, among others. For more information about Hopper Mountain Refuge, go to

<http://www.fws.gov/hoppermountain/HopperMNWR/hoppermtNWR.html>