

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

For Release August 31, 1969

Walker 343-2463
Carroll 343-5634

AMERICA'S LARGEST SOARING LAND BIRD IN TROUBLE

America's largest soaring land bird, the California condor, is in more trouble than the bald eagle. Fewer than 50 condors have been seen in recent censuses.

The Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife (BSFW) is working with the Agriculture Department's Forest Service, California's Department of Fish and Game, the University of California, and the National Audubon Society to save the California condor from extinction.

This five-agency effort includes censuses to determine precise numbers, field studies of behavior, and establishment of permanent sanctuaries where the giant vultures are known to live.

Condors weigh about 20 pounds and spread their wings at least 9 feet in flight. Adult plumage is dark brown or black with a large white patch under each wing. The condor's bare head is orange when adult, but young have dusky heads and lack much of the white wing lining.

Disturbances by man, including shooting and poisons, and periodic food scarcity may be the main reasons for this small population. The bird is vulnerable to shooting because it ranges 40 to 50 miles and soars low along mountain ridges as it seeks out food. The cooperating agencies have records of nine persons firing at condors in four years, with five birds killed or injured.

Protective measures already taken include the prohibition of shooting by California State law, which provides penalties of 6 months to a year in jail, a fine of \$500 to \$1,000, or both. Two sanctuaries have been set aside by the Forest Service on Los Padres National Forest in California, where the bird is known to live. Field studies are underway by experts of the cooperating agencies to turn up vital information on breeding and other behavior.

A management plan formulated by the Forest Service regulates forest use in the area adjacent to some of the homes of the birds on the national forest. Visitor attendance, economic development, and forest management are controlled to avoid disturbing the birds.

BSFW and the Forest Service each have a biologist studying the bird in the field to see what other management measures may be constructive, and the National Audubon Society has a full-time naturalist patrolman on duty.

Commissioner Charles H. Meacham of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says constant cooperation between State, Federal, and private conservation agencies is needed not only in law enforcement, but in developing local and national pride in the bird, and in educating people not to shoot at them.

A member of the vulture family, condors feed on dead animals and as such are part of nature's clean-up crew. Most females rearing young lay a single egg in alternate years, and it takes about six years before the young mature. Nests are established in high cliffs or sheer bluffs.

Formerly the bird ranged from the Columbia River in Oregon, south to Baja California, and east to Utah and Arizona. Prehistoric remains show the bird also lived in Texas and in Florida. Today the entire remaining population is restricted to a few sites in southern California.

