



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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TRAPPING OF CALIFORNIA CONDORS TO BEGIN IN SEPTEMBER

G. Ray Arnett, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, said today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will begin trapping California condors in early September as the start of a "last ditch" captive breeding and research program designed to save the endangered bird.

Arnett said that initially only two condors will be captured and fitted with radio transmitters. Each will be released and then carefully monitored before permission is sought from the California Fish and Game Commission to capture additional condors.

The Commission unanimously approved the State permit on August 7, authorizing the capture and handling this season of a maximum of nine condors for captive breeding, radio telemetry, and other research purposes. Three of these birds will be kept in captivity as breeding stock, including one as a mate for Topa-topa, the only condor presently in captivity.

"We are pleased with the Commission's vote of confidence," Arnett said. "That confidence is well placed in the Fish and Wildlife Service, with its proven success record of breeding endangered species in captivity. While no one can guarantee that our efforts with the condor will succeed, I am convinced that the program is biologically imperative. Time is running out for the California condor."

Fewer than 30 of the giant vultures are thought to remain in the rugged mountainous terrain some 70 miles north of Los Angeles. With a 9-foot wingspan, the condor is one of the country's largest birds and also one of the

slowest to reproduce in the wild, laying only one egg every two years. Experts estimate the condor population has declined steadily by about 2.5 birds a year since 1966.

"Unless this trend is reversed," Arnett said, "the condor could become extinct within the next decade and could be functionally extinct before then. We will continue to work closely and cooperatively with California wildlife officials and all those who are concerned with saving this majestic bird for future generations."

The Federal permit authorizing the capture, captive breeding, radio telemetry, and other research was issued on July 24, 1981. State and Federal permits are necessary to fully implement the long-range Cooperative California Condor Conservation Program, which was signed in December 1979 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Audubon Society, California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

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