



California Condor

September 2016

- California condors are the largest flying birds in North America. Adults have wingspans of 9.5 feet, weigh up to 25 pounds, and may fly several hundred miles in a single day.
- These giant soaring birds eat up to 3.5 pounds of carrion per day. They find carcasses by honing in on other scavengers such as golden eagles, ravens and turkey vultures.
- California condors nest in cavities on cliffs, canyon sides, ledges, coast redwoods in Central California and historically, in the giant sequoia of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. They lay one egg every other year. Parents take turns incubating the egg and feeding the chick, which depends on the parents for food until it is about one-year-old.
- Thousands of years ago, California condors ranged from British Columbia to Baja California and as far east as Florida. By the early 1900s, they were found only in California, Oregon, Arizona and Mexico. Today there are more than 400 condors in the world; approximately two-thirds of them are in the wild.
- The primary threat to recovery is lead poisoning from carcasses contaminated with spent lead ammunition. Additional threats include power lines, nest failure from micro-trash ingestion, predation and eggshell thinning (caused by DDE, a chemical byproduct of DDT still found in the environment).
- In the 1980's, with only 23 California condors left in the world, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its conservation partners captured the surviving birds and began a captive breeding program. Captive-raised birds have been released to the wild in California and Arizona. The first nesting attempt in the wild following reintroduction was in 2001. The first successful nest fledged in 2004 at Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in California.
- Captive breeding, releases to the wild and regular testing and treatment are still necessary because of lead poisoning.
- Biologists manage condor nests by inoculating chicks against West Nile virus, testing their blood for lead and checking for bits of trash in the chick and in the nest.
- The wild breeding population continues to grow as more condors reach breeding age. Condors continue to recolonize their historic range.

