# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR
# news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release March 28, 1984 — Alan Levitt 202/343-5634

## 1984 MARKED BY SETBACKS, SUCCESSES FOR ENDANGERED CALIFORNIA CONDOR

The discovery last week of a dead California condor is viewed as an unfortunate setback in what researchers in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) have otherwise characterized as the most successful year to date in the effort to improve the chances for survival of this severely endangered species.

Radio signals led scientists to a remote section in the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains in California on Thursday, March 22, where they discovered a dead male condor, thought to be between 5 and 6 years old. Preliminary results of an autopsy conducted at the San Diego Zoological Park by a zoo veterinarian and a scientist from the Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Health Laboratory have not established the cause of death. The bird had not been shot. A small (8mm by 1mm) piece of metal, of unknown content and origin, was found in the gizzard and is being analyzed. Tissue analyses will also be conducted to try to pinpoint the cause.

The immature condor had been tagged with two miniature radio transmitters in October 1982 in an effort to track its movements in its range throughout the rugged coastal hill country north of Los Angeles. Scientists became concerned when radio signals indicated the bird's movements had stopped. They discovered its carcass late Thursday afternoon.

"We have no clues yet about the cause of death of this condor," said Robert A. Jantzen, director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, which sponsors the condor recovery project along with the California Department of Fish and Game, National Audubon Society, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management. "The only positive aspect we can take from this situation is that it demonstrates the critical value of radio telemetry in allowing us to investigate condor deaths that we know are occurring in the wild, but that have previously been nearly impossible for us to document."

There are only an estimated 16 California condors known to exist in the wild, with another nine birds in captivity at zoos.

(MORE)

The latest death follows what scientists hail as the most successful season yet in the ongoing attempt to remove condor eggs from breeding pairs in the wild and hatch them in captivity. Six condor eggs have been removed from four wild pairs this season and placed in incubators at the San Diego Zoo, where they are expected to hatch within the next few weeks. Four eggs and two nestlings were removed from the wild last breeding season. Researchers are also heartened by the discovery of a fifth breeding condor pair, thought to be nesting in the most unusual location yet spotted--halfway up a 200-foot giant sequoia tree in Sequoia National Forest. Prospects for discovery of additional condor eggs in the near future are good, scientists say.

Removal of condor eggs to the carefully maintained environment of artificial incubators stimulates production of replacement eggs by breeding pairs, a phenomenon known as "double-clutching." The removal can also significantly lessen the chances that eggs or chicks might fall victim to predators or nesting squabbles between adult condors.

"Egg production has been excellent this year and we anticipate good chick survival," Jantzen said. "The encouragement we take from this news is tempered by our concern over the deaths of two wild condors. We are still in need of a more complete understanding of the reasons for condor mortality."

A young female California condor was also found dead in Kern County, California last November.

###