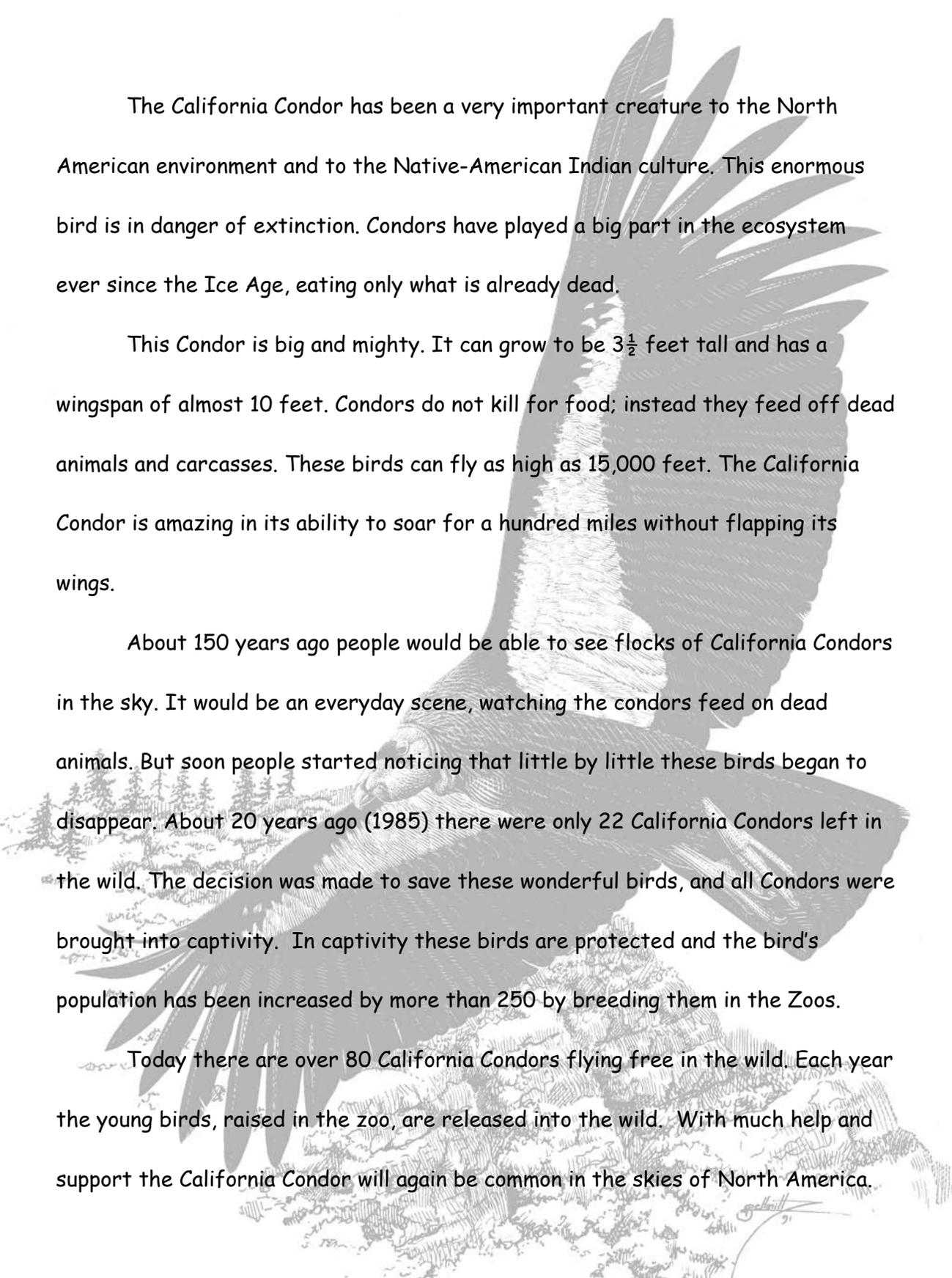




California condor, *Gymnogyps californianus*



The California Condor has been a very important creature to the North American environment and to the Native-American Indian culture. This enormous bird is in danger of extinction. Condors have played a big part in the ecosystem ever since the Ice Age, eating only what is already dead.

This Condor is big and mighty. It can grow to be $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet tall and has a wingspan of almost 10 feet. Condors do not kill for food; instead they feed off dead animals and carcasses. These birds can fly as high as 15,000 feet. The California Condor is amazing in its ability to soar for a hundred miles without flapping its wings.

About 150 years ago people would be able to see flocks of California Condors in the sky. It would be an everyday scene, watching the condors feed on dead animals. But soon people started noticing that little by little these birds began to disappear. About 20 years ago (1985) there were only 22 California Condors left in the wild. The decision was made to save these wonderful birds, and all Condors were brought into captivity. In captivity these birds are protected and the bird's population has been increased by more than 250 by breeding them in the Zoos.

Today there are over 80 California Condors flying free in the wild. Each year the young birds, raised in the zoo, are released into the wild. With much help and support the California Condor will again be common in the skies of North America.