



The Peregrine Fund

Working with Birds to Conserve Nature



December 7, 2000

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FIRST PAIR OF BREEDING CALIFORNIA CONDORS TO BE RELEASED

The first pair of breeding-age California Condors ever to be released into the wild will be released on December 7, 2000 at the Vermilion Cliffs in Arizona. They will join 15 young condors already flying free in the Grand Canyon area.

The pair of condors to be released were flown on November 8 from the captive breeding program at The Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey. In addition, another pair of breeding age condors, eight young condors, and one condor that was previously released and brought back into captivity due to his attraction to humans were flown to the release site. Since arriving they have been acclimating to the area while being housed in two flight pens atop the Vermilion Cliffs and establishing a social order among themselves. The new condors are being regularly visited by the 15 wild condors roosting in the area. These additional condors are tentatively scheduled to be released on December 13 and December 29.

Biologists are anxious to observe the mated pairs and hope that they will be reproductive role models for the younger condors – released since 1996 as fledglings – as they reach reproductive maturity.

"The mated pairs have spent their whole lives in captivity so they will be learning survival lessons from the 15 younger birds in the Grand Canyon and southern Utah area," said Nancy Kaufman, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Regional Director. "These could be the first California Condors to reproduce in the wild in over 15 years. Restoring breeding in the wild will greatly advance condor recovery," concluded Kaufman.

"Production in the wild is what recovery of endangered species is all about and the release of adult pairs of condors brings us closer to that goal. These two captive pairs could lay fertile eggs in a year or two. There are also two pairs in the wild that could lay

eggs as early as 2002. With this release we believe the project has moved to the next level," stated Bill Heinrich, Species Restoration Manager for The Peregrine Fund.

Becky Hammond, acting manager for the Bureau of Land Management's new Vermilion Cliffs National Monument stated, "It is very exciting for us to be involved with the condor restoration effort."

The historic Arizona release is a joint project between The Peregrine Fund, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Arizona Game and Fish, National Park Service, CORE, and numerous other partners. The Peregrine Fund, a non-profit conservation organization headquartered in Boise, Idaho, is conducting and largely funding the release; BLM is managing the habitat; the USFWS is responsible for the overall recovery of the species; and the Arizona Game and Fish is responsible for all wildlife in Arizona. Regular updates are being provided by biologists on The Peregrine Fund's home page (<http://www.peregrinefund.org>).

The California Condors are being released as a "non-essential/experimental population" under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act. Section 10(j) provides that the species can be released in an area without impacting current or future land use planning. This authority has been spelled out further in an innovative agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local governments. This "Implementation Agreement" spells out a positive working relationship between the Federal government and the various local governments.

There are currently 164 California Condors in the world -- 53 in the wild in California and Arizona and 111 in captive breeding facilities (World Center for Birds of Prey, Zoological Society of San Diego, and Los Angeles Zoo).

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

Photos of California condors are available by contacting George Andrejko (602-789-3231) or at websites <http://arizonaes.fws.gov> and <http://www.peregrinefund.org>

VIEWING OPPORTUNITY:

The public is invited to congregate below the towering 1,000 foot Vermilion Cliffs to observe the release of nine young California condors at 11 a.m. on Friday, Dec. 29, 2000.

Follow Highway 89A for 27 miles west of the Marble Canyon Bridge and turn north (right) on House Rock Valley Road for three miles. Weather-permitting, the roads are easily passable in two-wheel drive passenger vehicles and will be clearly marked on December 29.

Observers are advised to wear layered warm clothing (temperatures could be near freezing) and to bring ample food and drinks. Bringing spotting scopes or powerful binoculars and a lawn chair will enhance the experience. Observers should be advised that there are no shelters or restroom accommodations at the observation site. Biologists and land managers will be on site to provide information, answer questions, and celebrate the occasion.

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Focusing on birds to conserve nature

WORLD CENTER FOR BIRDS OF PREY

December 7, 2000

CALIFORNIA CONDOR FACT SHEET

- NAME:** California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*)
- WEIGHT:** 20 to 24 pounds
- WINGSPAN:** Up to 9.5 feet (3 meters)
- BODY LENGTH:** 46 to 55 inches
- VOICE:** None, but may grunt or wheeze
- NEST SITE:** Usually a cave in a cliff or a crevice among boulders on a steep slope.
- INCUBATION PERIOD:** About 56 days for egg to hatch.
- FOOD SUPPLY:** Historically, carcasses of bison, elk or deer in inland areas and seals and beached whales along coasts. With the loss of wild game and the introduction of cattle and sheep, the condor changed to feeding on carcasses of domestic animals. Has ability to travel 150 miles a day in search of food.
- RANGE:** Occurred historically from British Columbia south to northern Baja California and in other parts of southwestern United States.
- POPULATION:** There are currently 164 California Condors in the world -- 53 in the wild in California and Arizona and 111 in captive breeding facilities (World Center for Birds of Prey, Zoological Society of San Diego, and Los Angeles Zoo).
- REPRODUCTION:** Usually one egg every other year in the wild.
Up to three eggs per year in captivity.
- CAUSE OF DECLINE:** Shooting, poisoning, and loss of food supply and habitat.