



California Condor Nestling in Arizona Biologists Confirm Existence of Chick

Contacts:

Jeff Cilek, The Peregrine Fund, 208/362-3811 office, 208/890-6685 cell

Bill Austin, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 928/ 226-0614

David Boyd, Bureau of Land Management, 435/688-3303

Maureen Oltrogge, Grand Canyon National Park, 928/638-7779

Andi Rogers, California Condor Coordinator, Arizona Game and Fish Department, 928/774-5045

Images may be obtained from The Peregrine Fund's web site at:

http://www.peregrinefund.org/press/condor_chick_8_03.html

Biologists from Grand Canyon National Park and The Peregrine Fund confirmed the existence of the first California Condor nestling in Arizona in decades, perhaps centuries. The sighting was confirmed on Saturday during an arduous 24-mile hike in 100 degree heat to observe the nest. The biologists observed the feathered chick at the edge of the nest cave near the top of a 400 foot cliff in the Salt Creek drainage. The chick appeared to be very healthy and is estimated to be 15-16 weeks of age.

"It was amazing!" stated Sophie Osborn, Field Manager for The Peregrine Fund. "The chick was right on the edge of the nest cave sitting on a rock preening and looking around," continued Osborn. "The setting so timeless, remote, and magnificent that I wondered how it could be the only one of its kind in such a vast tremendous place." finished Osborn.

Since March, biologists suspected that Condors 123 and 127 were incubating an egg. Suddenly, in early May the behavior of the pair changed and they became very attentive to the nest, switching nest duty on a daily basis. This appeared to indicate the presence of a nestling (incubation period for condors is usually 56-58 days). Due to the location and depth of the nest, however, the only way to confirm the existence of a nestling was to wait until the chick was old enough to move to a location in the nest where it could be seen.

"This is truly what wildlife reintroductions are all about - natural reproduction in the wild. This is wildlife history in the making and we are confident it is just the first in a long line of Arizona-hatched condors soaring across our skies," stated Arizona Game and Fish Director

Duane Shroufe. “This is the end result for which everyone has been working for so diligently, finished Shroufe.

“This chick is a tremendous reward for more than seven years of hard work by all reintroduction cooperators,” stated Andi Rogers, California Condor Coordinator for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. “This is unbelievably exciting,” finished Rogers.

“This is wonderful news. We've been anxiously awaiting this news since 1996, when condors were first released in the Vermilion Cliffs in Arizona,” stated Roger Taylor, Arizona Strip Field Manager for the Bureau of Land Management.

"It's news we've all been waiting for. It marks a giant step forward in the wild recovery of a spectacular species," said H. Dale Hall, Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Region.

“It was great to see such a healthy, energetic chick. It was alert and active. After the female fed it, it bounced around the cave like a little rabbit. It was indescribable to see the first condor chick in Arizona in more than 100 years in a setting like the Grand Canyon,” stated Chad Olson, Raptor Technician for the National Park Service.

“Although Park and Peregrine Fund biologists have been confident of a viable chick nesting within the redwall from the daily observations, we are thrilled at this visual confirmation. This chick faces a daunting task for survival. We will continue to monitor the chick and provide full protection to the nesting area as the last four weeks prior to fledging are critical. Restoration of condors marks a monumental event in the Colorado Plateau,” stated Joseph Alston Superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park.

This is the last of three nests that biologists were monitoring in Arizona this year. Two other nests produced eggs but neither were successful. In California this year one egg was laid and hatched in early May.

Regular updates from the field on all of the California Condor activities in the Southwest are provided on the Notes from the Field section of The Peregrine Fund’s web site (www.peregrinefund.org).

On another front, the Phoenix Zoo successfully treated Condors 203 and 235 who had lead fragments in their digestive systems. Both condors were suspected to have ingested lead from a coyote carcass on the Kaibab Plateau. Biologists plan to re-release the two birds later this week.

The historic Arizona reintroduction is a joint project among The Peregrine Fund, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Southern Utah's Coalition of Resources and Economics, and numerous other partners. Funding for the project is being provided by The Peregrine Fund, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Peter Pfendler, National

Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund Awards, Steve Martin/Natural Encounters, Grand Canyon National Park Foundation, Grand Canyon National Park, Kearney Alliance, Patagonia, Turner Foundation, Globe Foundation, Earth Friends, Arizona Public Service, Wallace Research Foundation, Grand Canyon Conservation Fund, and others.

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. However, in Grand Canyon National Park condors are provided full protection as federally protected threatened species. 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.

* * * *



The Peregrine Fund

Focusing on birds to conserve nature

WORLD CENTER FOR BIRDS OF PREY

CALIFORNIA CONDOR (*Gymnogyps californianus*) FACT SHEET

- SIZE:** Weight: 16 to 23 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.
- REPRODUCTION:** Condors reach sexual maturity and attain adult plumage and coloration by five to six years of age and breeding is likely between six and eight years of age. A mature condor will lay one egg (average incubation period for a condor egg is 56 days) every other year during a successful nesting cycle. The species provides extensive parental care to very few young.
- FEEDING:** Condors are strict scavengers. Historically, carcasses of bison, elk or deer in inland areas. Seals and beached whales along coasts. With fluctuating populations of wild game, the condor has adapted to utilizing carcasses of domestic animals too.
- Unlike Turkey Vultures, condors do not have an exceptional sense of smell. They find their food visually, often by investigating the activity of ravens, coyotes, eagles, and other scavengers. Without the guidance of their parents, young inexperienced juvenile condors may also investigate the activity of humans. As young condors learn and mature this human directed curiosity diminishes.
- RANGE:** Occurred historically from British Columbia south to northern Baja California and in other parts of southwestern United States. Has ability to travel 150 miles a day in search of food.
- POPULATION:** On July 1, 2003, there were 223 California Condors in the world -- 82 in the wild in California and Arizona. In 1982, there were only 22 California Condors in the world.

YOUNG: Nestlings fledge (leave nest) full grown at six months of age, however, historically juvenile condors may be dependant on their parents for more than a year. Reintroduced condors are released on their own and must learn to forage and survive with the now existing free-flying population.

SEXES: There is no sexual dimorphism (observable difference in size or appearance) between males and females.

IDENTIFICATION: Numbered wing tags, white or mottled triangle under wing, no feathers on head, and head color black in juveniles or orange/pink in adults, not dark red as in Turkey Vultures.

CAUSE OF DECLINE: Unsustainable mortality rate in the wild and a naturally low reproductive rate. Predation, shootings, poisoning, lead poisoning, and collisions with power lines are some of the major threats.

CONDOR ENCOUNTER: Please enjoy the birds from a distance. Do not approach or attempt to feed a condor. **Never feed, shoot, or throw objects at a condor.** The California Condor, hawks, eagles, vultures, and owls are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty and the Endangered Species Act. Under these acts it is illegal to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, or attempt any of these activities to a bird of prey. If a condor approaches you, or you observe anyone harassing or harming a condor, immediately notify:

The Peregrine Fund - (928) 355-2270 (azcondors@aol.com)
Arizona Game & Fish - (928) 774-5045
Bureau of Land Management - (435) 688-3200
National Park Service - (928) 638-7756

If you should observe a condor please report your sighting to Peregrine Fund biologists at (928) 355-2270 or e-mail us at azcondors@aol.com. Helpful information would include date, time, location, number of birds observed, and wing tag numbers if possible.