



NEWS MEDIA ADVISORY

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THREE CONDORS TO BE RELEASED OCTOBER 4

On October 4, 2003, three additional California Condors will be released from an aviary atop the Vermilion Cliffs in Arizona. The 14th release in Arizona will increase the Southwest's population of North America's largest flighted bird to 37 in the wild, including one young in a nest. Four additional condors currently in the flight pen will be released later this year.

All three condors hatched at The Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey, two during the spring of 2002 and one in the spring of 2001. All three are males.

"The recovery of the California Condor continues to make steady progress," stated Bill Burnham, Ph.D., President of The Peregrine Fund. "These three condors have a significant challenge ahead of them, but the field team has tremendous abilities and will smooth the way," finished Burnham.

"We're looking forward to seeing three more condors released from the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument," said BLM Arizona Strip Field Manager Roger Taylor. "This release, in conjunction with the successful nesting of condors in the wild this year, moves us closer to a self-sustaining population of California Condors in Arizona."

"The release of new condors is always an exciting and challenging time for project personnel. Even though we are in the 7th year of condor reintroduction, with each release we learn more details about individual condor behavior, release strategy, and post-release monitoring," said Arizona Game and Fish Condor Biologist, Andi Rogers.

"This is a dynamic period in the condor reintroduction experiment," said Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwest Regional Director, Dale Hall. "For the first time in decades, condors are reproducing in the wild and learning parenting skills. The birds we'll be releasing will be exposed to these demonstrably successful mentors; we anticipate this will increase their success in the wild and contribute to the species' recovery."

"Grand Canyon National Park welcomes the continuation of the condor program and looks forward to seeing more birds being released into the wild," says Kate Cannon, Deputy Superintendent, Grand Canyon National Park.

Since their arrival from Idaho, the condors have been maturing and acclimating to their new surroundings in a large release facility on top of the cliff. One condor (#243) was released for a few weeks in 2002 (February 16 - May 5) but biologists felt it lacked maturity to sustain itself in the wild and returned it to the release site. After they are released, the birds are expected to stay close to the release site and slowly explore their new home. Regular updates are provided on The Peregrine Fund's home page (www.peregrinefund.org).

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, Grand Canyon Trust, 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.

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Who: Everyone is invited. Project biologists will be on site to provide program information. However, no structured program has been established.

When: Scheduled for 9:00am, Saturday, October 4.

Where: At the far west end of the Vermilion Cliffs, 27 miles west of Marble Canyon, Arizona on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Road 1065 (aka Upper House Rock/Coyote Valley Road) three miles north of US Highway 89A (at the western end of Vermilion Cliffs). This is a graded, sedan-accessible road. From this

vantage point, attendees will have a clear, but distant, (one mile away and 1,000 feet up) view of the release facility atop the Vermilion Cliffs.

How: All are advised to bring warm, layered clothing (temperatures can range from 20-60° F), snacks, warm beverage, plenty of water, spotting scopes, binoculars, and folding chairs. Project biologists will be on site to provide program information.

Note to Editors:

To obtain video or still images of California Condors, please see www.peregrinefund.org/press/images/condor290302_photos.html or contact:

Jack Cafferty, The Peregrine Fund, 208-362-3811

Jeff Humphrey, US Fish and Wildlife Service, 602-242-0210

Gary Schafer, Arizona Game and Fish, 602-789-3232

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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 5-6 years of age and breeding is likely between 6-8 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.
- In 2002, three young were produced in the wild in California and two eggs were laid in Arizona. These are the first successful hatches in the wild since the early 1980s.
- In 2003, two pairs of California Condors nested successfully. One in California and one in Arizona.
- 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 September 1, 2003, there were 222 California Condors in the world -- 84 in the wild in California and Arizona. In 1982, there were only 22 California Condors in the world. By 1987, the remaining wild California Condors were brought into captivity to reduce the risk of extinction. Since then, captive propagation has produced a sufficient number of condors to allow for the reintroduction of California Condors in the wild.
- RECOVERY:** The immediate goal of downlisting the California Condor from endangered to threatened status is to establish three, self sustaining, 150-bird populations; one in captive breeding facilities and two separate wild populations.
- 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.
- FEEDING:** Condors are strict scavengers. Unlike Turkey Vultures, condors do not have an exceptional sense of smell. They instead 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.
- 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.** California condors, hawks, eagles, vultures, and owls are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty and some, including the California Condor, are protected under 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 The 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.