



State of Utah  
Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Wildlife Resources

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### Rare wild-hatched condor chick takes flight

VERMILION CLIFFS, Ariz.— For only the fifth time in 20 years, a wild-hatched California condor is taking flight on its own. This week, an endangered condor chick, which hatched at the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument in Arizona this spring, successfully fledged and took its first flight toward independence.

“The chick was active and anxious all day on Wednesday, flapping its wings and hopping around its nest cave area,” says Vince Frary, a biologist with The Peregrine Fund who watched the bird fledge. “That afternoon, the chick’s mother landed at the cave and fed the chick. She stayed for a few minutes and flew away, but the chick got very excited. In just seconds, it hopped onto a narrow ledge just above the nest cave and tried to hop a short distance farther, before it realized it had gone too far and made a futile attempt to hop back. Instead, the chick began gliding down directly below the cave in a less-than-graceful fashion.”

All of this happened in strong winds of 10 to 20 miles per hour. The young condor landed on a small ledge halfway down the cliff face and slowly worked its way up 20 yards over the next few hours. Just before dark, the chick’s father landed on a perch above the nest cave and roosted near its young.

“Compared to other members of the vulture family, condors continue to care for their young for a fairly long period of time,” says Kathy Sullivan, a condor biologist with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. “Both parents will continue to feed the chick for several months until it gains complete independence at approximately 1 year of age. Because of this breeding pattern, condors typically produce only one offspring every other year.”

The fledging of this young condor marks only the fourth time a wild-hatched California condor has flown on its own in Arizona since the birds’ reintroduction in this state in 1996. This week’s fledging marks another significant milestone in the Condor Recovery Program that’s working to bring the birds back from the brink of extinction. A second chick hatched in the wild this spring is also active and likely to fledge in Grand Canyon National Park any day.

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In 1982, only 22 California condors were left in the world. Efforts to capture and breed those birds have been successful. Condors are now released throughout the year at the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument site. Sixty condors currently fly free in Arizona, and a total of 273 California condors are in existence, including free-flying birds in Arizona, California and Baja California, as well as captive birds in Idaho, California and Oregon.

California condors have been federally listed as endangered since 1967. As North America's largest flighted birds, they have a wingspan of 9 1/2 feet and can weigh between 18 and 22 pounds.

The condor reintroduction project in Arizona is a joint program with many contributing partners, including The Peregrine Fund, Arizona Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Kaibab National Forest, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Southern Utah's Coalition of Resources and Economics, and numerous other partners.

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" outlines a positive working relationship between the federal government and the various local governments.

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