



California Condors Nesting in Arizona Biologists Confirm Existence of Young at Two Nesting Locations

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Biologists recently confirmed the existence of two California Condor nestlings in northern Arizona using behavioral observations of adult birds as an indicator. One condor chick was produced at a nest site in Grand Canyon National Park, while the second chick was produced at a nest site located on the Bureau of Land Management's Vermilion Cliffs National Monument. This marks the second consecutive year wild California Condors have been hatched in Arizona since releases began in 1996.

By intensive behavioral observations made largely by The Peregrine Fund and National Park Service biologists and volunteers, both nesting pairs were judged to have laid their eggs in mid- to late-March. Females lay a single egg directly on the floor of a cave and due to prolonged extensive care giving, may only lay one egg every other year. Condors typically do not reach reproductive maturity until they are five to eight years of age. If the two newest chicks fledge successfully it will bring the number of free-flying condors in Arizona to 47.

In May 2003, biologists confirmed the first wild California Condor had hatched, and in November 2003 they witnessed the first fledging of a nestling in Arizona in perhaps more than a century. Young condor #305 fledged (left the nest in flight) near the South Rim of Grand Canyon National Park last fall, and is currently residing in that area with its parents, integrating into the free-flying population of released birds and doing well.

“A generation of wild-hatched, -fledged and -reproducing animals is a significant benchmark in any reintroduction program,” said H. Dale Hall, Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Regional Director. “These hatchlings bolster our hope of reestablishing a truly wild population of California Condors.”

Joe Alston, Superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park, commented, “We are excited at the observations collected by the corp of eager and dedicated nest watch volunteers and biologists. Although it will likely be several months before we have a glimpse of the chick at the cave entrance, we fully expect another successful year in the southwestern condor program. Grand Canyon National Park is proud to be involved in such an important recovery effort.”

In April, biologists reported that three condors had hatched at separate nesting locations in southern California. As the largest flighted bird in North America, with a wingspan reaching up to nine-and-a-half feet, condors typically fledge full-grown at around six months of age; however, juvenile condors may be dependent on their parents for more than a year. Therefore, it will be some time before it is known if this year's nesting attempts in either Arizona or California will be successful.

The California Condor was included on the first Federal Endangered Species List in 1967 and is currently one of the most endangered birds in North America. On June 1, the entire wild and captive California Condor population reached a total of 242 birds from a low of 22 in 1982. Ninety-seven are now flying free in California, Arizona, and in Baja Mexico.

"We're proud of every stride made in condor recovery," says Andi Rogers, head of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Condor Program. "Arizona reaches a new milestone with two wild condor nestling in one year."

"We are thrilled to hear that two condor pairs successfully hatched eggs in Arizona this year," said Roger Taylor, Field Manager for the BLM Arizona Strip Field Office. "Vermilion Cliffs National Monument has been the primary condor release site in Arizona since the effort began, and now it's wonderful to see it as a nesting area as well."

"Patience really is a virtue when working with California Condors," stated Bill Heinrich, Species Restoration Manager for The Peregrine Fund. "The seven years that it took from the initial Arizona release to the first successful fledging of a condor in the wild seemed to take forever. Now, with two more young hatched this year, we hope to be able to look forward to the production of wild-hatched young on an annual basis."

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 website.

The historic Arizona reintroduction is a joint project between 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, Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund Awards, Grand Canyon Conservation Fund, Grand Canyon National Park Foundation, The Grand Canyon Trust, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Arizona Public Service, Earth Friends, Globe Foundation, Department of Interior Cooperative Conservation Initiative, Kearney Alliance, Steve Martin/Natural Encounters, Patagonia, Connie Pfendler, Peter Pfendler, Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, Jane Smith Turner Foundation, Turner Foundation, Wallace Research Foundation, 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. 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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