

Reward offered in condor cases

Two birds were found shot last month. The U.S. is investigating — and so is a P.I. hired by a private group.

LOUIS SAHAGUN

The shotgun shooting of two California condors has prompted a large reward — as well as a spat between federal wildlife investigators and a private detective hired by an environmental group.

A private detective from Culver City, Bruce Robertson, should “stay out of my way,” said Dan Crum, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s resident agent for Northern California and lead investigator into the recent shootings in Monterey County, near Big Sur.

“We are not working together, and he is not working with us,” Crum said Thursday. “When it comes to things like reading our case reports, absolutely not.”

“On the other hand,” Crum added, “if he digs up something good, we’ll take what we can get.”

Robertson was hired this week by the Center for Biological Diversity to help crack the case, which has spawned one of the largest rewards ever offered in connection with an injured endangered species.

By Thursday afternoon, the reward established by a coalition of environmental groups and wildlife advocates had grown to \$40,500.

In an interview in his office, Robertson, who is a member of the Center for Biological Diversity, said, “I believe that the reward will loosen tongues in rural areas where times are tough right now.”

Robertson declined to reveal his approach to the case on grounds it might tip off the shooter. However, he said he plans to travel to Monterey County next week to “begin organizing a team of investigators who will leverage their connections in the area to cast a wide net.”

“A lot of information connected to this case will have to



GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

ON IT: Bruce Robertson was hired by the Center for Biological Diversity. A private reward in the case is at \$40,500.

be obtained at ground level, meaning feet on the street,” he said.

“The goal is to solve the crime. These shootings need to stop right now. We can’t wait for weeks or months.”

“I’m not interested in getting in the way of the forensic investigation,” he added. “I just want to make sure the investigation is moving along as efficiently as possible.”

In the meantime, the wounded condors remained under care at the Los Angeles Zoo, suffering from lead poisoning and gunshot wounds.

Biologists with the Ventana Wildlife Society, based in Monterey, discovered the ailing birds — an adult male known as condor 286 and a juvenile female, condor 375, last month.

The birds were taken to the Los Angeles Zoo, where veterinary examinations revealed that the male had 15 buckshot pellets embedded in its muscle tissue and the female had three pellets in the left wing and thigh.

Federal biologists said the poisoning resulted from inges-

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— **BRUCE ROBERTSON**, private detective and member of the Center for Biological Diversity

and being fed through a tube. The female was in better condition, but it was unclear whether either one would be able to fly again.

They are among 81 California condors in the state, and 322 on the planet. Condor recovery programs have made the majestic scavengers reliant on humans to provide food free of contamination from lead ammunition.

California passed a law in 2007 that prohibits hunters from using lead ammunition within the California condors’ 2,385-square-mile territory.

Anyone with information about the cases is asked to call the California Department of Fish and Game TIP line at (888) 334-2258.

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tion of lead ammunition fragments in game downed by hunters.

The pellets, however, were fired from shotguns. Investigators want to find who fired the shots.

On Thursday, Humane Society officials said the male condor was in critical condition