

THE CALIFORNIA CONDOR

After nearing extinction in the 1980s, the California condor is fighting to regain its place in the American wilderness. The Center for Biological Diversity is dedicated to working towards full recovery for the condor.

The California condor is one of the world's most endangered species. Condors were so close to extinction in the mid-1980s that the last 22 wild condors were captured and a captive-breeding program was initiated. Remarkably, condors have proven adept at breeding in captivity, and the captive population was healthy enough by the mid-1990s to begin releasing condors back into the wild.

There are currently almost 100 condors in the wild, with more being added by the captive breeding program every year, and hopes are high for the first survival of wild-hatched chicks since reintroduction began. The goal of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's condor recovery program is to restore at least two self-sustaining wild populations of 150 each.

Yet the condor still hovers on the brink of extinction. The last wild condors were brought



Photo courtesy of USFWS

into captivity because of the high risks they faced in the wild, particularly due to lead poisoning from scavenging carcasses killed by hunter-shot ammunition. Reintroduced condors face a variety of threats, including habitat loss, oil and gas drilling activities, lead poisoning, shooting, and collisions with power lines.

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CONDOR FACTS

- Scientific name: *Gymnogyps californianus*
- Height: 3.5 to 4.5 feet
- Weight: up to 31 pounds
- Wingspan: 9 to 10 feet
- Lifespan: up to 60 years
- Flight: Condors can reach altitudes of 15,000 feet, fly distances of up to 150 miles a day, and at speeds of up to 55 miles per hour.

GETTING THE LEAD OUT

If left unaddressed, lead poisoning could negate the efforts of the condor reintroduction and recovery program. When condors scavenge on carcasses, they often seek out and consume bone fragments, an important source of calcium. However, the condors often mistake lead bullets left in carcasses for bone fragments. Lead is especially dangerous to condors because the bullet fragments remain in their system longer and are absorbed more readily than in other birds of prey.

Since 1997, five condors have died and over 30 condors have required emergency blood treatment due to lead poisoning. Because of this threat, the condors are regularly captured for blood testing as part of the recovery program. They are also fed regularly in the hopes that they will not scavenge on carcasses contaminated with lead.

In recent years, the Center and a coalition of partners have sponsored a “Get the Lead Out” campaign to encourage hunters to use non-lead bullets. Though the California



Photo courtesy of USFWS

Fish and Game Commission has encouraged hunters to remove bullet fragments from carcasses, and to bury gut piles, it is clear that voluntary measures are not enough.

Using its authority to regulate migratory birds, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service banned lead shot for waterfowl hunting in the 1980s. But only state governments possess the power to ban lead bullets for deer or small animal hunting.

This past winter, the Center and its partners petitioned the California Fish and Game Commission to require non-lead ammunition for deer and other hunting. Unfortunately, the Commission did not vote to uphold this ban.

YOU CAN HELP

The Center will continue to push for the removal of the lead threat, as well as for the reduction of other condor mortality threats. We are fighting to protect essential condor habitat in southern California. You can support our campaign to protect the condor by becoming one of our 13,000 members, whose gifts fund our work and whose support gives us a more powerful voice for endangered species. Add your voice to ours.



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