

Conservation Efforts and Current Status of the Endangered California Condor



Defenders of Wildlife – California Program



Basic Condor Facts

- California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*), with a wingspan of up to 9.5 feet and weighing 17-25 pounds, is the largest terrestrial bird in North America
- Condors historically ranged throughout Western North America from southern British Columbia to northern Baja California, Mexico, with some ranging as far east as Florida and New York
- Current range is southern coastal ranges from Big Sur to Ventura County and east through the transverse range and the southern Sierra Nevada, with other populations in Baja California and Arizona
- Condors are scavengers, meaning they do not kill for their food, but eat dead animal carcasses – think of them as nature's cleaning crew
- Condors can live 45-80 years, but average about 60 years if conditions are right for their survival

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Conservation Status

- The California condor was listed by the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service as endangered on March 11, 1967
- Critical habitat for the California condor was established on September 24, 1976
- The condor was listed as endangered under the California Endangered Species Act on June 27, 1971
- The California condor has been listed as a Fully Protected Species under California state statute since 1953
- There are nearly 300 California condors in the world today, about 70 of which are free-flying in California



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Captive Breeding & Recovery Program

- Due to a variety of factors, the population steadily declined during the 20th century until there were only 22 California condors known to exist in the world
- The last of the free-flying condors were taken into captivity in 1987 to avoid additional mortality and to preserve as much diversity of the gene pool as possible
- There were no California condors in the wild 1988-1991
- Reintroduction into the wild began in early 1992 and continues today
- The captive breeding program involves the San Diego Wild Animal Park, Los Angeles Zoo, Oregon Zoo, and The Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Idaho
- Despite vigorous efforts to regularly test condors for lead blood levels and administer chelation treatment as necessary, condors continue to be poisoned and at least 13 have died from lead contamination

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Threats to Wild Condors



- Lead poisoning from carcasses or gut piles tainted with lead from ammunition
- Collision with & electrocution from power transmission lines and poles
- Ingestion of microtrash (bottle caps, screws, etc.)
- Incompatible development within condor habitat
- Poaching and accidental shooting
- Other sources of poisoning, such as automobile antifreeze and crude oil

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What AB 821 Would Do

- Require the use of non-lead centerfire ammunition when hunting big game or taking coyote within the current and historic range of the condor in California
- Implement a program for the California Department of Fish & Game to provide big game hunters within this area with non-lead ammunition at no or reduced charge, as funding allows
- Both of these measures could significantly reduce the availability of lead to wild condors and take an important step in addressing the primary obstacle to condor recovery



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