

CONDOR UPDATE - 03 MAY 2005

Condor nesting season is in full swing! The Peregrine Fund reports three condor nests this spring. The new pair (condors 187&136) is doing well on the North Kaibab Forest. Condors 123&127 are nesting in the Grand Canyon again (parents of condor 305 from 2003). Condor 114 has found a new mate, condor 126, and they are nesting at the Vermilion Cliffs. We hope to have some news on hatching starting in mid-May.

As mentioned above, condor 114 is nesting with a new mate this year. Last year he and condor 149 nested and produced condor 342. After 342 was captured for surgery and released in January 2005 (see previous update), 149 basically abandoned her chick (and her mate), which left 114 responsible for feeding 342. Condor 114 did an exemplary job, but he soon started courting other female condors. He continued feeding 342 until he and his new mate, condor 126, began nesting in early April. Condor 342 was suddenly on his own! There was a time of concern surrounding 342's new independence, especially after the death of Condor 305 (see previous update). Would 342 feed on his own? That question was answered on April 7th when 342 was observed feeding on a proffered carcass at the release site. Since then, he seems to have assimilated with the other birds at the release site and has been observed with a crop on a regular basis.

The other 2004 wild-hatched chick, condor 350, is also doing well. Chris Parish (P.Fund) forwarded some exciting news regarding this bird. On May 1st, condor 350 flew from its nest site in the Grand Canyon to the Vermilion Cliffs release site with its parents (condors 127&119) and several other condors. Biologists observed 350 feeding with 119 at a proffered carcass several times throughout the day. This marks condor 350's first trip to the release site!

Unfortunately there is some bad news to report. Condor 347 died on April 8th. This was a recently released (March 1st) captive-reared bird. The bird was captured on April 6th after an attempted hazing from a talus slope. The bird appeared lethargic and weak. Upon capture, it was determined that 347 was emaciated. Subcutaneous liquids were administered at the on-site rehab facility. The bird seemed to be responding and ate some food the next day. By April 8th however, the scenario worsened and 347 was no longer interested in eating. It was decided to transfer the bird to the Phoenix Zoo. Unfortunately 347 died in transit. Necropsy results are pending. A field lead test indicated background lead levels, ruling out lead poisoning. This bird had not been observed feeding on a carcass in about a month. Its behavior seemed normal, so it was assumed that like other birds, it was feeding on carcasses not visible from the observation blinds. As a precaution, another recently released condor that had not been observed feeding recently was captured. It appeared healthy and weighed well within normal range.

On a more upbeat note, there are 11 young condors in the flight pen awaiting future release. This includes two more birds from the captive facility that have recently been transferred to Arizona. There are also three adult condors in the flight pen experiencing "time-outs" for harassing potential breeding pairs. They will be re-released once breeding season winds down. The captive-rearing facility is also having a banner breeding season, so there could be a record number of birds for release in 2006.

Condor movements are on the rise! Groups of birds are now traveling from the release site with more frequency. They're visiting Navajo Bridge and the South Rim of the Grand Canyon on a regular basis, as well as traveling the Colorado River corridor.

Updated condor numbers: *Total population* – 243
Captive –130; *Wild* – 113 (Arizona-52; California-54; Baja -7)