

California Condor Update - 31 August 2005

Condor Nesting

There has now been a visual confirmation of the chick at the Grand Canyon nest cave! Eddie Fetes of the Peregrine Fund made the long hike into the canyon for the observation. So it's official, we have two wild-hatched condor chicks in Arizona for 2005. Condors 123 & 127 appear to be doing a good job tending to the chick.

Condors 114 & 126 are also diligently tending to their chick at the Vermilion Cliff's nest cave. The next good news I hope to share with you will be the fledging of both chicks this fall!

News from California

The California project has unfortunately not had the same good fortune. They had three nesting attempts in southern California this year. One nest ended in failure and an intact egg was abandoned. The egg was too desiccated to determine cause of failure. The two other nesting attempts resulted in the hatching of two chicks. One chick is currently in captivity after surgery to remove micro-trash from the bird's gizzard. The other chick was removed from the nest after it appeared unhealthy and unfortunately died the next day. Necropsy results are pending. The ingestion of trash by condor chicks is not a new issue in CA. They have unfortunately experienced trash ingestion issues for a few seasons now. Let's hope they find a solution to this problem, and let's hope we don't see trash ingestion rear its ugly head in AZ.

Condor Releases

Condor 314 was re-released with the two remaining condors that were transferred from California (Condors 270 and 287) on 19 August 2005. As you may recall, condor 314 recovered from a traumatic injury this summer (see previous updates). This brings the total number of free-flying condors in Arizona to 55 birds (although some birds are being temporarily held for behavior reasons). There are still 8 birds in the flight pen awaiting release for this fall/winter. The World Center for Birds of Prey will also be sending us several more birds for release in 2006.

Condor Movements

Condor movements altered a bit last month. Condors can still be viewed at the Vermilion Cliffs release site, the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, and the North Kaibab Forest. There are also between 2-10 condors that have been making regular trips to Utah, near Zion National Park. The trend for birds visiting Utah seems to be increasing, while the number of birds at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon decreased in August.

Condor Symposium at the AOU 2005 Meeting in Santa Barbara, CA

A California condor symposium was held on 27 August 2005 as part of the annual AOU meeting. Over 300 professionals attended the symposium, including representatives from the Peregrine Fund and AZ Game and Fish. There were four presentations on the condor project in AZ. First, Chris Woods of the Peregrine Fund presented an update of the AZ project, identifying lead toxicity as the leading cause of death. Next, Chris Parish of the P. Fund presented detailed lead exposure data, stressing the seriousness of this problem. Then, Grainger Hunt of the P. Fund presented lead bullet fragmentation data. The radiographs showing the hundreds of lead fragments in the deer carcasses spoke for themselves! Grainger also illustrated the correlation between condor movements onto the Kaibab Plateau during the deer-hunting season with sharp increases in lead exposure rates. Finally, I presented an update on the efforts to reduce lead exposure in AZ. The Peregrine Fund did a great job setting the stage for this presentation. I outlined our extensive education efforts, our scientific research to determine the causes of lead exposure in condors, the formation of a voluntary lead reduction coalition for sportsmen, and our free-non-lead ammo program for deer hunts on Units 12A and 12B this fall. The praise by the condor community was overwhelming. Thanks to the work from AZGF employees like Bruce Taubert and Ron Sieg, as well as help from our cooperating partners, we're taking major steps in the right direction on the AZ condor project! Let's keep getting that voluntary lead reduction message out there. And let's hope we see a reduction in lead exposure this fall!

Condor Numbers

Total population - 277

Captive – 156

Wild - 121

Arizona – 57 (including the two 2005 chicks)

8 awaiting release

California – 55

9 awaiting release

Baja – 9

7 awaiting release