



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Pinnacles
National Monument

5000 Hwy 146
Paicines, CA 95043

(831) 389-4485 phone
(831) 389-4489 fax
www.nps.gov/pinn

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News Release

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Contact:

Daniel George, Condor Program Manager, Pinnacles National Monument:
Daniel_George@nps.gov

Kelly Sorenson, Executive Director, Ventana Wildlife Society:
kellysorenson@ventanaws.org

First Wild Raised Condor Chick In San Benito County Flies From Nest


PINNACLES – California Condor 514, the first condor hatched in this Central California county in at least 70 years, recently took his first flight.

The bird was observed on Oct. 17 perched some distance from his nest high on a cliff. “The two places I’ve seen him he definitely didn’t hop to,” said Jason Bumann, manager of the RS Bar Guest Ranch where the nest is located some 12 miles east of Pinnacles National Monument in San Benito County. “I saw him in two different spots I know he had to fly to get to.” Bumann hoped a visit with biologists planned for later this week would coincide with another one of the bird’s first flights.

Historically, California Condors bred in San Benito’s rugged backcountry. While the last conclusively documented nest there was recorded more than a century ago, a pair may have nested some 70 years ago.

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Condor 514 has been reared by two first- time parents, Condors 303 and 313. The pair produced a single egg last spring. In order to test the wild- laid egg for contaminants, biologists rappelled into the birds' cliff nest and traded the egg for one produced at the Los Angeles Zoo on April 17. The egg hatched a day later.

Condor 303 was released in Big Sur and Condor 313 is the oldest male released at Pinnacles National Monument. “ It is not only exciting to see a pair of condors breeding in San Benito County again, but even more interesting that the pair was formed by birds originating from two release sites,” said Ventana Wildlife Society’s executive director Kelly Sorenson.

Regular monitoring shows a healthy, growing bird. Condors typically take 5 ½ to 6 months after hatching before taking wing, and remain close to the nest site and parents for many months afterward.

“The fledging of this condor is an important step in re- establishing a condor flock in the wild,” said Eric Brunnemann, Superintendent, Pinnacles National Monument. “Condors raised in the wild by parents hatched in zoos prove that these birds have retained their breeding instincts and can reassume their natural role in the ecosystem,” added Daniel George, Condor Program Manager at Pinnacles National Monument.

Condors typically produce a solitary egg every two years, and do not begin breeding until about six years of age. The enormous birds – their wings span more than nine feet and they can weigh upwards of 20 pounds – are thought to live as many as 60 years in the wild. They soar over vast distances in search of the carrion that comprises their diet.




The location of the nest was revealed through radio telemetry and global positioning technology. National Park Service biologists worked with Bumann and his staff to first locate the nest early last year. The owners of the 18,300- acre ranch teamed up with members of the condor recovery effort and the nonprofit Pinnacles Partnership to make possible public viewing of the nest. Nest visits are continuing, and further information is available by going to www.pinnaclespartnership.org or by calling 831- 389- 4486 ext 239. RS Bar Guest Ranch is a private lodge specializing in retreat events and hunting. More information about the lodge can be found at www.rsbarranch.com. “This has been a win- win for the ranch and for condors,” said Mark Paxton of the Pinnacles Partnership.

After a precipitous decline in numbers, California Condors remain one of the rarest birds in the world, with a population numbering about 350, and fewer than 200 free- flying birds in the world. That’s a hopeful increase from 1982, when just 22 California Condors lived. The birds were captured that year in a bold attempt to rescue the species from extinction.

Condor numbers declined for a number of reasons, but the critical factor was revealed only after the captive breeding program began. The primary threat to California condor recovery was found to be lead poisoning. Condors can inadvertently ingest lead bullet fragments lodged in animal carcasses and gut piles. As a result, the California Legislature and California State Fish and Game Commission have restricted use of lead ammunition throughout the birds’ range.

The continuing effort to re- establish California Condors at Pinnacles is a cooperative endeavor between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Ventana Wildlife Society, the Institute for Wildlife Studies, Pinnacles Partnership and private partners like the RS Bar Guest Ranch, in collaboration with the California Condor Recovery Team. The San Diego



Wild Animal Park, Los Angeles Zoo, Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey and the Oregon Zoo breed condors for wild release.

Additional information on the California Condor Recovery Program can be obtained by visiting www.nps.gov/pinn or www.ventanaws.org.

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