



Ventana Wildlife Society

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Friends,

This year, one special condor named Traveler (171) nearly lost her life to a battle with lead poisoning. After surviving 25 years, her life was hanging in the balance, but thanks to our field crew and partners, she was successfully treated and released back to her home in Big Sur, rejoining her mate Shadow (209). We enjoy celebrating these triumphs and sharing them with you as condors continue to recover in the wild.

Thankfully due to new state funding now available, we are expanding our education programs to provide services to more youth and families in critically needed areas such as Salinas and Castroville, California. Having purchased another van this year, our fleet of three is ready to overcome a major barrier to accessing the outdoors – transportation. Our recently hired bilingual educators are excited to lead the work in these local communities.

For the last two years, we have been recovering from the Dolan Fire and COVID, but we have come out the other side for the better. Our Big Sur Condor Sanctuary rebuilding effort is going very well and most importantly, the wild condor flock is also rebounding. As COVID restrictions have largely lifted, we have been going full steam ahead in taking the next generation outdoors so that everyone, humans and wildlife, can thrive.

To our donors and volunteers, let us add that your contributions to Ventana Wildlife Society have helped to make these victories possible, and your help in the future will allow us to continue to meet new and existing challenges. We are extremely grateful!

Sincerely,



Kelly Sorenson
Executive Director



Bill Eckert
Board Chair

P.S. Keep up with the condors through our streaming cams and monthly Condor Zoom-Chats



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Table of Contents

- 4 Education and Outreach
- 7 Education Program Coordinators
- 8 California Condors
- 10 Central California Condor Population
- 12 Traveler (171)
- 12 Monthly Condor Zoom-Chats
- 13 S'MORE in Big Sur
- 13 Tricolored Blackbirds
- 14 All Things Condor
- 14 Financials



BLUE ZONES CERTIFIED

In 2022, Ventana Wildlife Society became Blue Zones approved, adding yet another reason why this is such a great place to work. *The Blue Zones Project is a well-being initiative designed to make it easier for us as individuals and as a*

community to make healthier choices. The initiative

is based on principles like moving naturally, eating mindfully, and reducing stress, among others. We organized a wellness team to help staff stay connected to these principles and to each other, leading to a happy and productive work place. As Education and Outreach Manager Alena Porte says, "We all love working at Ventana Wildlife Society, but this will kick it up a notch." For more information on the Blue Zones Project, visit: <https://montereycounty.bluezonesproject.com/>

Education and Outreach

GOAL

Inspire a conservation ethic and encourage youth to take action through integrating innovative scientific and ecological education.

LEAPS AND BOUNDS

How do you build upon success? You make it bigger, and add new layers and depth. For years, Ventana Wildlife Society has developed outdoor education programs based on principles like connecting youth and nature, increasing outdoor equity, and building meaningful experiences with the help of the communities we serve. Our commitment to these principles recently helped us acquire several grants that have substantially expanded our staff and services. Once serving 1,000 youth annually before the pandemic paused in-person programs, we are now poised to serve 2,500 in person per year with this new financial support.

Over the next four years, we will provide two community-focused programs, both funded by the Outdoor Equity Grants Program, created through AB 209 and administered by California State Parks, Office of Grants and Local Services.

Funding will support the Alisal Farmworker Family Nature Prescription Programs and the Community Bird School and Nature Programs in Salinas. Both programs provide weekly classes, family field trips and campouts and monthly youth-led community nature clubs. Coordinator Cecilia Gutierrez likes how these outings break through barriers that can often discourage students from exploring natural places, like Laguna Grande Park in Seaside, or the beach in Monterey. “It warms my heart,” she says, “when I hear a student say they’ve had the best day ever.”







In early 2022, we were also awarded a Youth Community Access grant by the California Natural Resources Agency. Funded by Proposition 64, this grant has allowed us to expand our youth programs. That means more whale watching, more kayaking, more camping, more sand to vacuum out of the vans... and more best days ever!

Yes, Ventana Wildlife Society's outdoor education programs are bigger and better than ever. Alena Porte continues to manage the education staff in her 18th year with us. She oversees an organizational record of five program coordinators and a team of instructors. Our growing number of bilingual staff has also made Ventana Wildlife Society



more accessible and responsive to the needs of our community. Together, we are leading our community outdoors to a life of better health and wellness.



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Graciela Rodriguez, Youth Programs and Outreach Coordinator | **Patricia Castellanos**, Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) Community Nature Program Coordinator | **Samantha Schmitt**, Teen and Teacher Program Coordinator | **Cecilia Gutierrez**, Community Bird School and Nature Program Coordinator | **Yulissa Ochoa**, Nature Prescription Family Program Coordinator



Teen and Teacher Programs provide teacher training funded by a Bay Watershed Education and Training grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. These programs feature recurring meaningful watershed educational experiences and an online teacher community portal for shared curriculum.

California Condors

GOAL Recover self-sustaining, free-flying populations of California Condors and serve as an internationally-recognized model of success.



Traveler (171) survives a lead poisoning scare thanks to the swift action of recovery partners and her own indomitable spirit.

Every so often, we are reminded of the resiliency of condors, and their individual stories of survival can be our greatest source of hope for the population. Condor 171, Traveler, was the story in 2022. You might expect any bird with a name like Traveler and 25 years of experience in the wild to have plenty of stories. But, her experience this year was extraordinary. She ingested lead from a carcass tainted with lead ammunition and was on the brink of death. Our partners, the Pinnacles National Park crew, captured and transported her to the Oakland Zoo for treatment. There,

the zoo staff stabilized her, but her crop stasis from the lead poisoning rendered her unable to pass food. Her prognosis was bleak. So, Traveler was flown by LightHawk to the Los Angeles Zoo, where she underwent emergency surgery to remove lead fragments from her digestive tract. Within a week, she turned the corner and regained her ability to digest food. She gradually recovered her weight and strength over the next two months before we released her back into the wild. Now she is back with the wild flock and reacquainting with her mate Shadow.



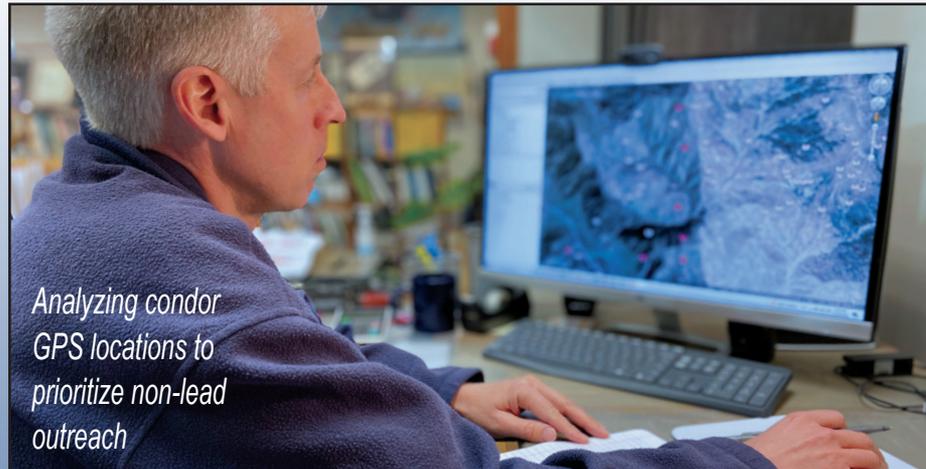
Although scientific literature presents evidence of spent ammunition as a source of lead poisoning, we occasionally have a firsthand look at this process, through x-rays of lead fragments in the digestive tract of a condor.

We had much to celebrate in 2022. Condors continue to nest successfully in the wild, increasing the wild central California population by three this year. We further augmented the flock with the releases of Iniko and five other females in San Simeon in late 2021 and we released four more in November 2022. We assisted the Yurok Tribe with the first ever condor releases in northern California by prepping four young condors in our San Simeon facility. We then transferred them to the release site in Redwood National Park, where they will be the progenitors of the new northernmost condor population.

We made significant progress on our Big Sur Condor Sanctuary rebuild by completing the work on the condor release pen. During the Dolan Wildfire in 2020, both the research cabin and condor release pen were destroyed. This new pen will allow us even greater flock management and enhanced monitoring capabilities. The overnight/research facility is on track to be completed in spring /summer of 2023.



Yet despite this good news, the condor population has suffered in recent years. After reaching a population high of 102 condors in central California by the end of 2019, numbers dropped to 91 in the next two years. Some of these losses were due to the Dolan Wildfire in 2020, but a closer look at the numbers reveals a more worrisome trend. Condors have experienced a surge in lead poisoning since 2019, contributing half of the staggering 26 fatalities in 2020 and another 13 in 2021! By comparison, we documented just two fatalities in 2018 due to lead poisoning.



Analyzing condor GPS locations to prioritize non-lead outreach

How can we explain this surge in lead poisoning years after California legislation banned the use of lead ammunition for shooting wildlife? Availability of non-lead ammunition could be a key. The surge in lead poisoning coincided with a post-COVID surge in firearm demand. Non-lead ammunition has been difficult to obtain ever since, creating challenges for those making the switch from lead.

It is clear that improving access to non-lead ammunition will be necessary to reduce the lead exposure threat for condors. That is why facilitating access to non-lead ammunition remains a major focus of our condor recovery efforts. Our GPS tracking and telemetry data allows us to target our outreach to areas that matter to condors the most.

Continued non-lead outreach is not the only thing that gives us hope. The survival of Traveler provides a timely inspiration. She reminds us that with our continuing help and support, condors can and will beat this lead problem, no matter how difficult things have been. The birds still need help, and we will provide it, aided by the unique talents of our collaborators and the generosity of our supporters. With Traveler flying free once again, we can more readily imagine clearer skies on the horizon, with the whole flock moving past the current dangers and onwards toward full recovery.



Traveler (171)

- Hatched May 26, 1997
- Hatch location: Los Angeles Zoo
- Released January 7, 1998
- Current Mate: Shadow (209)
- Favorite Nest Cavity: Redwood Tree
- Lineage: Granddaughter of AC-4, one of the last wild condors captured in the 1980s, AC-4 went on to sire more than 30 chicks in a captive breeding program that became the springboard for species recovery.



In her 25 years, Traveler has just about seen it all. She has soared over the Gabilan Range, where John Fremont raised the flag in 1846 and of course, she has gazed at countless sunsets over the Pacific Ocean from her secluded nest in Big Sur. 171's most monumental flight was to Mt. Whitney in the southern Sierras. This was a multiple day flight of 350+ miles, which is comparable to a commercial airline flight. Really speaks to their ability to cover huge distances and the size of their range. On September 9, 2022, after being grounded with a severe case of lead poisoning, she once again spreads her wings, at home over the central coast.

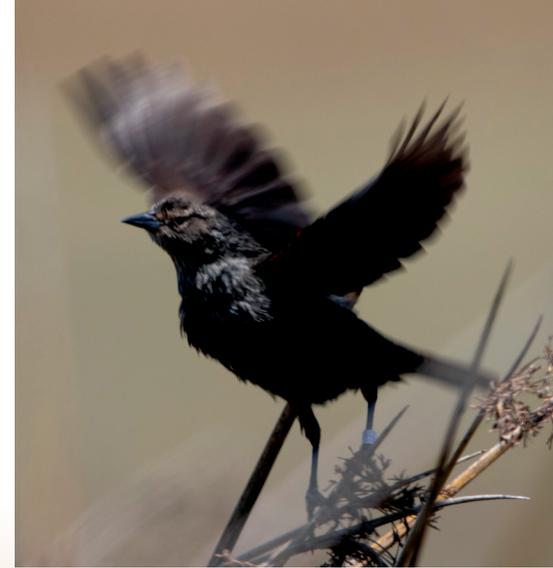
MONTHLY CONDOR ZOOM-CHATS

Most of us have a favorite show, whether or not we want to admit it. It might be a certain time of the week that we put everything else aside and settle on the couch, guarding the remote control. We hope you will join us online at 4:00 PM every last Thursday of the month and make the Ventana Wildlife Society Zoom-Chats one of your favorite programs.

Joe Burnett and the condor field crew will provide the latest news about the condor flock and answer submitted questions. Perhaps you will find that keeping up with the condors is more fun than any other reality show. We started these webinars in 2020 as a way to communicate with our members when the pandemic prevented live meetings. And, we haven't missed a month since. After all, gathering with you at the end of the month has become our favorite program too.

SPACE FOR MEANINGFUL OUTDOOR RECREATION AND EDUCATION

A s'more is not just a gooey treat over a campfire. In fall 2024, we look forward to breaking ground on a new S'MORE, that is, a Space for Meaningful Outdoor Recreation and Education. Just a short walk from our Discovery Center at Andrew Molera State Park, this project will create a campground primarily for youth and families from underserved communities. We thank the California State Coastal Conservancy, through the Explore the Coast Overnight Fund, as well as our generous guests who attended the April 2022 fundraiser, courtesy of Coastal Roots Hospitality and Tarp's in Monterey. For more information about the S'MORE project, including a video and site plans, visit: <https://www.ventanaws.org/smores.html>.



WE'RE NOT JUST INTO CONDORS

In 2022, Ventana Wildlife Society and Santa Lucia Conservancy joined forces to band more than 200 Tricolored Blackbirds in Carmel Valley, California. Banding data provides important information on local population trends and movement patterns for this state-threatened species. We also coordinated local breeding site surveys in 2022 on behalf of the Tricolored Blackbird Statewide Survey to help compilers determine a current global population estimate of 218,000 birds.



All Things Condor

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www.ventanaws.org/membership

TUNE IN MONTHLY - CONDOR ZOOM-CHATS

www.ventanaws.org/

WATCH CONDORS DAILY

www.ventanaws.org/condor_cam

FIND THE TRUE IDENTITY NOW

www.condorspotter.com

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www.instagram.com/ventanawildlifesociety

GEAR-UP WITH CONDOR MERCHANDISE

www.ventanaws.org/store



Financials

APRIL 1, 2021 - MARCH 31, 2022

SOURCES OF FUNDS

Grants and Contributions	\$1,132,254
Government Grants	\$ 544,924
Change in Value of Split Interest Trust	\$ 173,974
In-Kind Contributions	\$ 75,267
Fees for Service, Merchandise	\$ 28,440
Other Income	\$ 7,941
Investment Income, Net	\$ (325)

\$1,962,475

USES OF FUNDS

Program Services	\$1,543,759
Management and General	\$ 155,206
Fundraising	\$ 109,043

\$1,808,008

NET ASSETS

Net Assets, Start of Year	\$4,485,396
Change in Net Assets	\$ 154,467
Net Assets, End of Year	\$4,639,863

Download full audited financial statements and tax returns at www.ventanaws.org/organizationdocuments.html Thank you for your support! Want to check out previous annual reports? Download them all at <https://www.ventanaws.org/organizationdocuments.html>

Ventana Wildlife Society is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)3 organization, tax ID 94-2795935. Our office is located at 9699 Blue Larkspur Ln, Ste 105, Monterey, CA 93940.