



Ventana Wildlife Society  
2020 ANNUAL REPORT

# Dear Friends,

This year has been a stark reminder that things don't always go according to plan. And despite the challenges of 2020, we remain hopeful for the future.

In the first half of the year, the COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on our education programs and fundraising plans. We had to become more innovative and more creative.

In the absence of in-person students, our education department created online content to keep youth connected to nature, using state-of-the-art remote learning tools. Despite the loss of some funding sources, a Payroll Protection Plan loan helped ensure that our staff's work continued without interruption. And although we had to cancel our in-person annual *Feathers in Flight* event, we transformed our April fundraiser into our first ever online auction.

On August 20th, a difficult year took a dramatic turn for the worse when the Dolan Wildfire destroyed the Condor's Big Sur Sanctuary. As a result of the fire, we sustained serious losses to the condor flock—nine free flying condors and two condor chicks perished.

As the world became aware of the tragedy, thousands of viewers engaged in the story of the condors through social media and the explore.org live-streaming cameras. The extensive international media coverage brought to light the story of one amazing condor chick, "Iniko," who survived the wildfire as the flames and searing heat raged within a few feet of her nest high in a redwood tree. Iniko became a symbol of survival and hope.

In this report, we take a look back at this year, recounting the devastating impacts of the wildfire and sharing our vision for rebuilding the Condor's Big Sur Sanctuary to advance wildlife recovery, with a design to better withstand potential future wildfires.

We know that many of you have helped us despite experiencing your own losses this year. Your love of condors, your engagement in their story, and your commitment to conservation, truly inspires us as we move forward. You have shown us that even when circumstances alter our plans, we have your support, which allows us to continue condor recovery and achieve our conservation and education goals.

Together, we will continue progress toward a brighter future for condors. We wish you and your family the very best as you move forward through your own challenges this year.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Panetta  
Board Chair

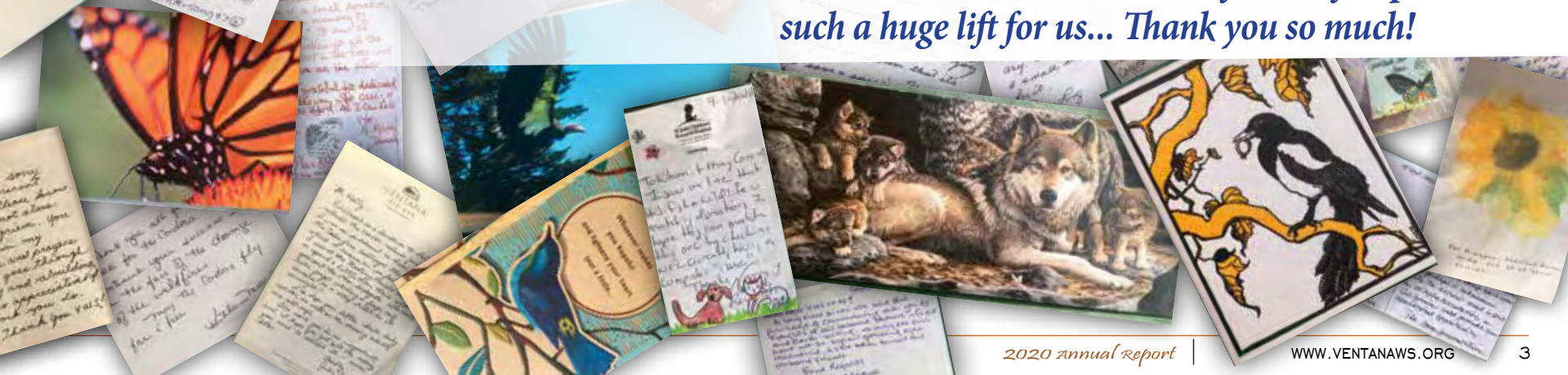


Kelly Sorenson  
Executive Director





*Your cards, notes, and letters after the fire provided such a huge lift for us... Thank you so much!*



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# COVID: *Condor Recovery*

While condors might have been unaware of a global pandemic, perhaps aside from noticing a lack of human activity along the Big Sur coast, the condor crew was prepared to implement safety measures to continue monitoring the flock of 100+ birds. These measures included a greater emphasis on remote monitoring, using our satellite GPS transmitters and live webcams. Most other essential tasks were also compatible with social distancing guidelines, such as hiking out to remote condor nests. The crew found themselves busy keeping track of a record 10 active breeding pairs in the spring of 2020.

One nest became quite famous this year when we installed a live webcam, allowing viewers from around the world to watch the chick develop on [explore.org](https://www.explore.org). Noticing the public's interest developing toward the chick, we held an online campaign to choose a name. Viewers from four continents responded with more than 600 suggestions. From that pool, we selected Iniko, a Nigerian name meaning “born during troubled times”. The response was overwhelmingly positive. “Watching this chick grow has been a calming space for me,” wrote one viewer in appreciation of the choice.

As many sought new sources of engagement during the mandated shelter in place, we established monthly Zoom Chats for our members to keep in touch with us and the condor population. We provided online feature presentations, stories from the field, and updates on Iniko and the other condor chicks. These meetings became especially important for sharing news with members in the wake of the Dolan Wildfire in the fall (see page 14 for more on the wildfire).

The COVID crisis might have affected condors the most in 2020 by limiting non-lead ammunition outreach. In fact, we suspended delivery of free non-lead ammunition during the shelter in place period. The pandemic also appeared to

*Condor Zoom Chats enabled us to stay in touch and share emotions with condor lovers through a very tumultuous year. These chats will remain an important link as we enter the new year. View the monthly archives at [www.ventanaws.org/zoom\\_chats](http://www.ventanaws.org/zoom_chats).*





affect the market by encouraging a staggering demand for ammunition and slowing the manufacture of some products. By summer, non-lead .22 LR ammunition was unavailable, and hunters were faced with mostly empty shelves when visiting their local stores. Thanks to funding that allowed us to build a reserve stock of ammunition before the crisis, we were able to resume distribution as a licensed vendor when the shelter in place orders were finally lifted. However, limited availability of non-lead ammunition in 2020, and difficulty acquiring it, likely contributed to the continued risk of condors being exposed to lead poisoning as the year ended.



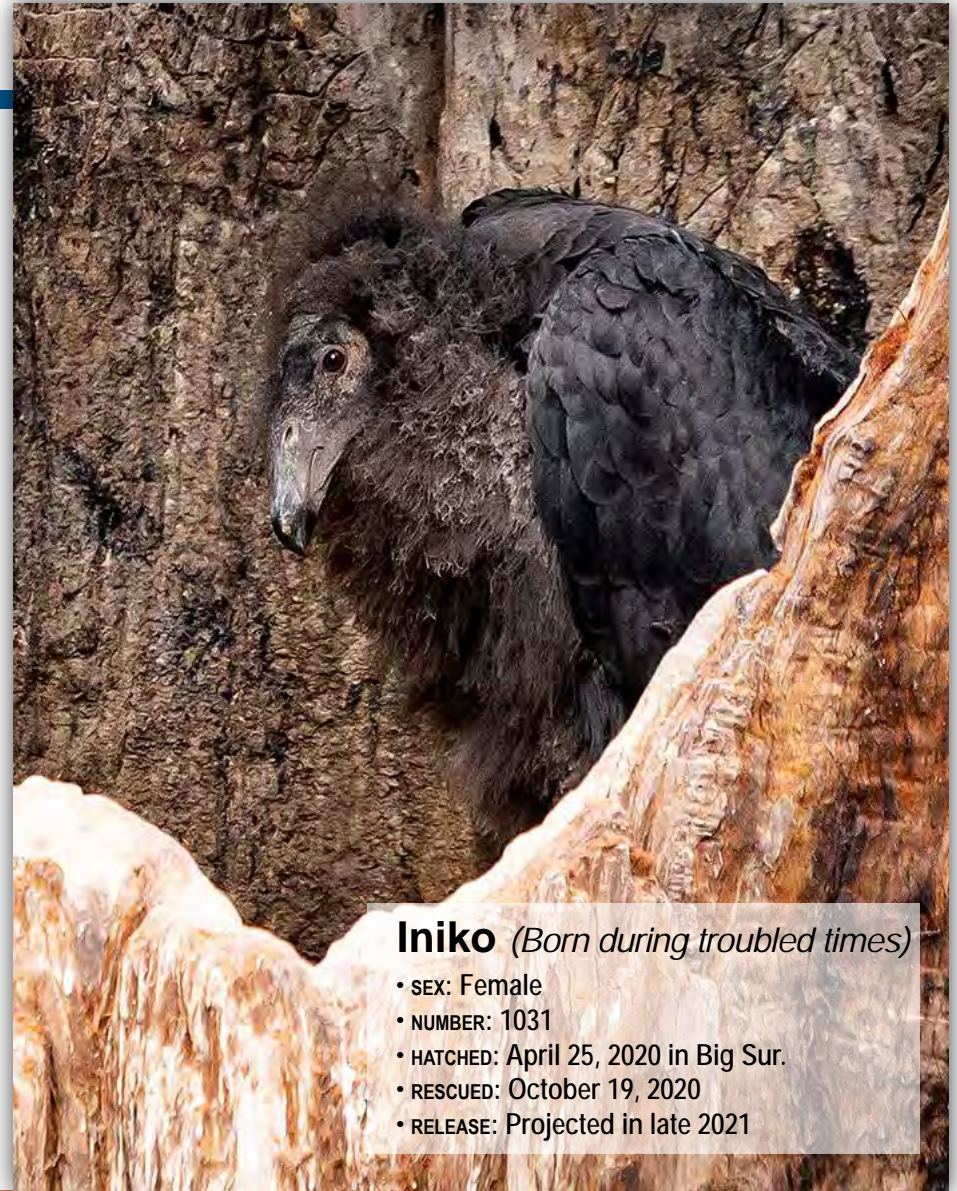
# *A Condor Named "Iniko"*

In a year of trials and tribulations, many of us could identify with Iniko, the condor chick that delighted viewers on our webcam, powered by explore.org. Sure, 2020 started off fine for Iniko, snug in her redwood cavity under the care of her parents, the most prominent pair in the population. But the good times would not last.

The Dolan Wildfire swept through one August night, taking her father Kingpin among the nine free-flying condors that were lost. The flames were hot for Iniko as well, but she managed to survive in her cavernous nest. As Redwood Queen rose to the task of being a single parent, a new challenge emerged. An unmated male condor attacked the nest, possibly seeing an opportunity to claim a vacant territory. Iniko was force-fledged from the nest during the scuffle.

Redwood Queen fought off the intruder, but Iniko's prospects seemed dim huddled there on the ground with only one parent. Our concern grew as time passed and the chick remained vulnerable, even showing a slight limp. The field crew moved in on October 19th and rescued Iniko, hiking her carefully out of the canyon and transporting her to Los Angeles Zoo for treatment and care.

Iniko is doing great and will be returned to the wild in 2021. As we watch her spread her wings over the central coast for the first time, it will be a pleasant reminder of the progress we are making toward condor recovery. Perhaps others will be reminded of how they too will rise again through these troubled times.



## **Iniko** (*Born during troubled times*)

- SEX: Female
- NUMBER: 1031
- HATCHED: April 25, 2020 in Big Sur.
- RESCUED: October 19, 2020
- RELEASE: Projected in late 2021

# COVID: *Education Programming*

*Maritza Abonce greets students on the first day of an online 2020 summer camp. We moved all outdoor programs to a virtual format to protect the health and safety of our students and staff.*



Of all Ventana Wildlife Society's activities, the pandemic had its greatest effect on outdoor education. Like schools, we had to switch from in-person to virtual classes to protect the health and safety of our students and staff. Gathering with students online instead of on site seemed backwards to us, and this feeling was reflected in our theme Outside-In. We served 107 youth virtually in summer 2020, just 12% of our pre-COVID capacity for in-person programs. Enrollment was light, primarily because many collaborators were unable to continue assisting with recruitment. The pandemic also brought the loss of some foundation grants, which further limited our ability to maintain consistent enrollment.

Despite the challenges, we think there was never more of a need for nature programming than in the turbulent year of 2020. Although actually being outdoors in nature has been the hallmark of our programs, and watching a computer screen might seem like a poor substitute, virtual nature programs can also work and



provide therapy when times are tough. By encouraging students to speak and listen to others, in the safe context of the natural world that we share, we can help them stay positive and manage the emotions wrought by the pandemic and prevailing social divides. Most of our virtual programs were offered for free to support our communities in these difficult economic times.

Outside-In was a fitting theme for a virtual Ventana curriculum in 2020, but we look forward to once again re-establishing the inside-out approach when it is safe to resume in-person classes. We even developed a reopening plan to guide us through the process. In the meantime, we are working with virtual service learner interns from California State University Monterey Bay to help us improve our programs through expanding nature prescription programming, bilingual content, social media, and social emotional learning. Our experiences this year will make us even better able to instill a conservation ethic in youth when we are ready to fire up those vans once again and hit the road to nature.





*While outdoor education programs ran aground in the spring and summer due to the pandemic, we helped students make the best of it with fun virtual learning opportunities to liven their shelter in place.*

# Trial by Fire

Wildfires devastated California this fall, in what was already a difficult year. On August 18th, the Dolan Fire started near the Condor's Big Sur Sanctuary, one of our key sites for restoring the condor population. It wasn't long before our remote live webcam showed an ominous orange glow signaling the fast approach of the blaze. Fortunately, there were no staff in harm's way, nor condors held in captivity. On the evening of the 20th, and into the morning, the fire destroyed the condor release pen, and as we would confirm a few days later, our research facility. In subsequent months, the fire burned nearly 125,000 acres of wildlands.

Although concerned about by the loss of our facilities, our primary worry was the status of the condors residing on or near the sanctuary. Condor chicks in five nests were in the direct path of the fire, including Iniko, who was already becoming famous thanks to our live-streaming nest cam powered by explore.org. Nervous viewers around the world watched Iniko peer at the flames from the lip of the redwood tree cavity right up until the video feed was lost. It was a helpless feeling for us, knowing there was no way to safely reach the nest until the inferno passed. Nearly two weeks later, when



we could finally hike to the nest, we were thrilled to find that Iniko survived the fire. The flames had charred the massive trunk to within 10 feet of the cavity, but the chick was spared. Thankfully, a second nest also survived.

But not all of the condors had such good fortune, the field crew discovered. Two chicks perished in their nests. There might have been another casualty if the crew had not been able to reach the fifth nest to rescue its chick before the fire arrived. While we took inventory of the chicks, the impacts of the fire on the entire flock were becoming clear. Radio and GPS tracking indicated that 10 free-flying condors were missing in the wake of the fire. Although seemingly capable of escape, condors can be particularly vulnerable

at night when mobility is limited. Only one of the birds, 209 Shadow, would be found. In all, the fire took approximately 10% of the central California population, a devastating blow to recovery efforts.

As the year drew to a close, we faced the task of rebuilding both the sanctuary and the flock. The amazing show of support from our members, colleagues, cam viewers, and the general public helped strengthen our resolve to rebuild new facilities that will offer improvements for condor recovery along with measures to better survive wildfires in the future. As you will read starting on page 20, this support will quickly put the recovery back on track. For that, we are so grateful.

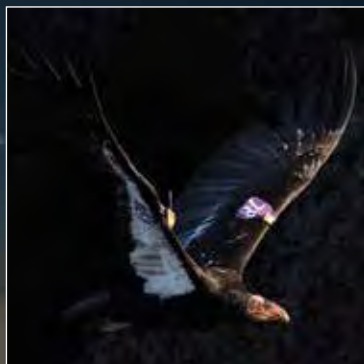
The condor cam powered by explore.org captured the approach of the **Dolan Wildfire** on August 20th (left) and how it destroyed the Big Sur Condor Sanctuary later that night.

# Forever Remembered

These nine condors went missing after the Dolan Wildfire and are presumed dead. They include two males and two females from the breeding population. The death of each is a significant loss for the central California population, but recovery will continue, boosted by the emergence of several fledged wild chicks and the release of additional birds in 2020 and 2021. Here we share some of our favorite photos of those we lost.



Male, 167 Kingpin, 23 yr old



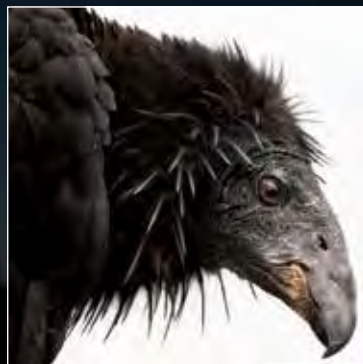
Female, 678 Electra, 7 yr old



Female, 875 Tonks, 3 yr old



Female, 375 Survivor, 15 yr old



Male, 773 Boreas, 5 yr old



Male, 992, 1 yr old



Female, 448, 12 yr old



Male, 789 Arthur, 5 yr old



Male, 1004, 1 yr old



## Huge Hug From Iniko

*We received over 1,500 individual donations after the Dolan Wildfire. Though we're unable to list every name, we are certainly grateful for each and every one of you!*



*A wildfire survivor, Iniko receives treatment at the Los Angeles Zoo in preparation for her return to the wild in 2021.*

# Rebuilding the Flock

As the last of the Dolan fire smoldered, weeks after destroying the condor sanctuary, we prepared our release pen to the south in San Simeon for the arrival of seven new California Condors. Raised in captivity at San Diego Zoo Global, these young birds arrived here via Pinnacles National Park on October 7th. After a period of acclimation to the central coast, they were released in November to play an important role in the future for condor recovery in central California

These new releases were especially important for rebuilding the flock after losing nine free-flying condors and two nestlings in the Dolan fire. Even before the fire, research models underscored the importance of continuing condor releases to support the population in the short-term while outreach efforts help reduce lead exposure and increase condor survival in the long-term. Because of our expertise and experience conducting releases, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other project collaborators have increasingly turned to Ventana Wildlife Society to help meet these recovery goals.

While renewing hope for population recovery as they ascend high above the central coast, these new releases carry an added inspiration: a name. Each bird in the cohort has been named by the indigenous peoples of the central coast. “As these awesome birds soar the skies of central California,” says Linda Yamane of the Rumsen Ohlone tribal community, “their massive wings will carry them over our traditional homelands. We are honored that these condors will carry a reminder of our people with them...” May they always be a reminder of the wonderful wildlife that we can all share and protect.

*Rebuilding the flock after the Dolan Wildfire will include releasing a new cohort. While the field crew will spend much of the winter monitoring the assimilation of these birds into the wild flock, they will also check up on the adult condors who lost mates in the fire to monitor their progress in establishing new pair bonds and territories.*





*Pixchi, Tich', Wassak, Muursh,  
Xakkin, Sottow, and Xuchen  
await release in San Simeon.  
Working with local indigenous  
peoples, we named these  
seven condors in the Rumsen,  
Salinan, and Esselen languages.*

# Rebuilding the Sanctuary

Even before the Dolan Wildfire was fully contained, the staff and board launched a campaign to rebuild the portions of the sanctuary that had been destroyed. Our original estimate of need was \$500,000 considering the extensive damage and high construction costs of building in remote locations. We seek to not only replace what was lost, but to recreate a sanctuary with more enduring prospects for supporting long-term wildlife conservation. We realized that we needed structures that were designed to better withstand the vagaries of nature, access roads that were better fortified against erosion, and facilities that could advance wildlife research. We see the sanctuary not for what it was, but for what it can and should be.

The response to our appeal has been incredible. In just 100 days, we received more than \$600,000 in gifts and pledges from a variety of foundations, fellow non-profits, agencies, and

individual donors. In fact, more than 1,500 individuals contributed. The widespread support was undoubtedly boosted by the popularity of Iniko, the condor chick viewed around the world via live webcam as the fire approached. Admittedly, we were devastated after seeing the full extent of the fire's damage on the condors and their sanctuary. Yet the public's engagement and support bolstered our resolve to quickly move forward with the rebuild.

Rebuilding the sanctuary is a process that will continue in phases. Initial work includes assessing and clearing damage, re-establishing water flow to the site used by wild condors for drinking and bathing, repairing the access road, and removing hazard trees and snags. We will then repair the release pen and rebuild the adjacent blind, allowing us to once again handle birds at the site. Ultimately, we will construct a research facility, complete with a bunkhouse for overnight staff accommodation, an observation area





*Major benefactors of the rebuilding effort include: Vinod Khosla, Margaret and William R. Hearst III, Hind Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Community Foundation for Monterey County, the Estate of Elizabeth M. McElroy, and several large anonymous donors. We also wish to thank Avangrid Foundation, Oakland Zoo, Defenders of Wildlife and the 1,500+ individuals who gave since the Dolan Wildfire.*



for studying condors, and indoor work stations. This facility will be designed with features to maximize fire-resistant materials and defensible perimeter space to protect against future wildfire threats. We anticipate completion of the sanctuary rebuild in the fall of 2022.

Our vision for the sanctuary rebuild is big. Our vision includes the full recovery of a self-sustaining condor population, our number one strategic plan goal. Our new sanctuary will allow us to conduct cutting edge research on condors and other wildlife, even after recovery objectives have been met. What we learn at the new sanctuary as we monitor condors through and beyond the recovery process can have an impact on how other vultures and raptors are protected around the world. Some of these species, like condors, are critically endangered and need the help that we can provide. Together, we have endured a lot this year and with your support we will achieve our vision of a brighter future for wildlife.

# Thank You

Members and contributors are essential to our success. Together we support the survival of a rich diversity of wildlife species and habitats.

**April 1, 2019 - March 31, 2020**

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Laura Lockett  
Geno Lucich  
Andrew Mandon  
Kristy Markowitz  
Marie McDonough  
Forrest Melton  
Roy and Sharon Michaels  
Stanley Miller  
Alexanne Mills

Bruce Mishkin  
Tritia Money Penny  
Barbara Moore  
David Morgan  
Susan Odle  
Oliver Osborn  
Michelle Overmeyer  
Emerenciana Paghasian  
Jonathon Pangburn  
Sheldon Pennes  
Susan Pierszalowski  
Mary Pommerich  
Sylvia Qualls  
Neil Richman  
Briana Rodriguez  
Diane Rooney  
Marianne Rowe  
Mary Ellen Ryan  
Christine Sanborn  
Corina Sanchez  
Heather and Bob Sanders  
Kathie Smallwood  
Margaret Spring  
Cheryle Stauffer  
Denise Stevens  
Mark Sutherland  
Douglass Swanson  
Zeb Sweesy  
Lucile Taber  
Pamela Takigawa  
Sarah Thiede  
Tim and Cammy Torgenrud  
Lonni Trykowski  
Jean Turbes  
Ruth Updegraff  
Eessa Vanderspek  
Christina Watson  
Mary Yoshitsugu

#### **IN MEMORY OF**

Kann Aachi  
Cyndi Adame  
Dorothy Albee  
Alice O Baldwin  
Alvern Baxter

Patricia Lee Brown  
"Ranger Pat"  
Wendy Buck  
Richard Bury  
Annyce Chertorisky  
William Hollis "Bill" Clutter  
Father Paul Danielson  
Phillis Dietz  
Robert H Doorlag  
Big Daddy Earl  
Austin German Ellison  
Ernst and Beverly Ewoldsen  
Carl and Carolyn Furniss  
Marjorie Lucille Gross  
Victor A Hamilton  
Mahmoud Hamza  
Joyce Harris  
Francis Hartman-Kok  
Greg Hind  
Mel and Geri Hoven  
Laura Hubrich  
Glenys Huntington  
Barbara Hylton  
Richard Johe  
Kyuja Kafka  
Katie Lannon  
Darwin Law  
Don Larson  
Frank Lichtanski  
Joyce Messamer  
Janet Morton  
Mioko Okuda  
Richard and Patricia Reel  
John and Phyllis Richer  
Arthur L Shiffar  
Loretta Sorenson  
Rich Stallcup  
Dede Teeler  
Margaret Thurlow Todd  
Mike Tyner  
Carl Young

#### **IN HONOR OF**

Regina Grande  
Steve Johnston  
Christina Medina Dirksen

Susan Simon  
Alan and Sheila Spiwak  
Volunteers

#### **IN-KIND**

*Companies, organizations, and individuals who supported our education program and our 2020 Feathers event:*

San Francisco 49ers  
Alta Bakery and Cafe  
Alvarado Street Brewery  
AmFund  
Annie Glass  
Antonio Balestreri  
Bella's Studio  
Bernardus Winery  
Big Sur Food & Wine Festival  
Cannery Row Company  
Alison Cook  
Decker Stucios  
Estéban Restaurant  
Dan Green  
Hahn Family Wines  
Holman Ranch  
Mark Holsapple  
Tim Huntington/Webnectar  
Isa Catto Studio  
The Isle of Her  
Steve Johnston  
Katy's Place  
KSBW  
Marchesa Jewelry  
Mid Valley Pet Spa  
Carla Montague  
Monterey Bay Kayaks  
Monterey Signs  
Kerry Morris  
Kathy Musial  
Nepenthe Restaurant  
Susie Newcomb  
Oakland Zoo  
Passionfish  
Pebble Beach Company  
Pier 39  
Meehan Rasch

Roaring Camp Railroads  
Rosine's Restaurant  
The Sardine Factory  
Seabreeze Inn and Cottages  
Sierra Hot Springs  
SkinHappy MD  
Point Sur State Historic Park  
Storrs Winery and Vineyards  
Trucksis Enterprise  
The Wine Group

#### **COMPANY MATCH PROGRAMS**

*Many companies have matching gift programs through which they will match the charitable contributions made by their employees/retirees.*

*Check with your company's HR office to see if they offer gift matching. Many VWS members take advantage of this opportunity through their employers.*

AmazonSmile  
American Water  
Bank of America  
The Boeing Company  
Chevron Corporation  
Ciena Cares  
Google  
Hewlett-Packard  
IBM Corporation  
Johnson and Johnson  
JP Morgan Chase and Co  
Lexis Nexis  
Macy's  
McGraw-Hill  
Medtronic  
Merck Foundation  
Nvidia  
Microsoft  
Pacific Gas and Electric Co  
Shell Oil Company Foundation  
Wells Fargo

#### **THE LEGACY SOCIETY**

*We appreciate those who have remembered Ventana Wildlife Society through bequests or by naming VWS as a beneficiary in a life insurance policy or IRA:*  
Dana Abbott  
Barbara Baldock and Phillip Butler

Virdette L Brumm, PhD and Robertson Parkman, PhD  
Jack-e Cook  
Sandy Decker and Karen Mortillaro  
Charles and Diane DeWeese  
Randolph Floyd  
Carla and David Garnham  
Kathryn Hannay  
Jeanne Holmquist  
Sheri Howe  
Marguerite Little  
Margaret Maas  
Shirley Nootbaar  
Maya Hartman Rizzo  
Mark Rush  
Janet Shing  
Dianne Simmons  
Kelly Sorenson  
Jerry and Cheryl Stidham  
Frank and Barbara Strehlitz  
John Tindal  
Jim and Annie Tokarz  
Kris Trottingwolf  
*Estates that have matured:*  
Valerie Borton  
Howard and Elva Elliott  
Joyce Harris  
Helen Jack  
Dorothy Karnow  
Stephen Kresge  
A Hadley Osborn



# Rare Beauty

## King Vulture

(SARCORAMPHUS PAPA)

Although COVID cancelled our spring fundraiser, we held a weeklong virtual event in September featuring an online auction and a live Zoom Chat with Cacique, a King Vulture at the Los Angeles Zoo.

One of 23 species of vultures in the world, King Vultures live in tropical lowland forests of Central and South America.







**WATCH CONDORS LIVE**  
on [www.ventanaws.org/condor\\_cam](http://www.ventanaws.org/condor_cam)

*Spot a condor wearing a wing tag?*

**FIND OUT WHO IT IS**  
on [www.condorspotter.com](http://www.condorspotter.com)

**MEET YOUR FAVORITE CONDOR**  
on [www.ventana.org/my-condor-bios](http://www.ventana.org/my-condor-bios)

**FOLLOW THE BIG SUR FLOCK**  
on [Instagram.com/ventanawildlifesociety](https://www.instagram.com/ventanawildlifesociety)



# Financials

APRIL 1, 2019 - MARCH 31, 2020

## SOURCES OF FUNDS

Grants and Contributions	\$ 703,869
Government Contracts	\$ 282,212
In-Kind Contributions	\$ 44,990
Fees for Service	\$ 38,915
Investment Income, Net	\$ 766
Change in Value of Split Interest Trust	\$ (73,825)
Other Income	\$ 16,532
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$1,013,459</b>

## USES OF FUNDS

Program Services	\$1,061,823
Management and General	\$ 131,033
Fundraising	\$ 96,140
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$1,288,996</b>

CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	\$ (275,537)
NET ASSETS, <i>beginning of year</i>	\$3,231,786
NET ASSETS, <i>end of year</i>	\$2,956,249

*Note: Deficit largely due to receiving prior-year grants intended for expenditure in this fiscal year. Download full audited financial statements and tax returns at [www.ventanaws.org/organization-documents](http://www.ventanaws.org/organization-documents).*



## Ventana Wildlife Society

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[www.ventanaws.org](http://www.ventanaws.org) | [www.condorspotter.com](http://www.condorspotter.com)