



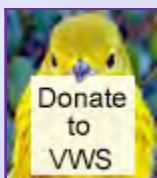
Ventana Wildlife Society CONDOR REINTRODUCTION NOTES FROM THE FIELD, 2000



[Click for full photo \(26K\)](#)

Click on small images to see full-size photos.

- [Home Page](#)
- [About VWS](#)
- [Condors](#)
 - [Field Notes](#)
 - [2006 Notes](#)
 - [2005 Notes](#)
 - [2004 Notes](#)
 - [2003 Notes](#)
 - [2002 Notes](#)
 - [2001 Notes](#)
 - ➔ [2000 Notes](#)
 - [1999 Notes](#)
 - [Video](#)
 - [Release](#)
 - [Life History](#)
 - [Cool Facts](#)
 - [Lead Exposure](#)
- [Eagles](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Habitat](#)
- [Ornithology Lab](#)
- [Big Sur Center](#)
- [Join VWS](#)
- [Donate to VWS](#)



All California condors released by VWS are given identification tags placed on their wings so that field biologists can monitor their individual progress. The wing tags, also known as patagial tags, have different colors based on the date of their release: Blue - December 12, 1997; Yellow - January 30, 1999; Orange - March 4, 2000; and White - scheduled for release in March, 2001.

Notes from the Field, December 2000:

On December 18, 2000, Ventana Wildlife Society transported 3 condor chicks, 7 and 8 months old, from San Diego Wild Animal Park to Big Sur, CA. The condors were flown up to Monterey Airport on a turbo prop aircraft donated by [Monterey Airplane Company](#). Ventana Wildlife Society Biologists then drove the condors from the airport to the Big Sur release site. Since transfer the 3 young condors -- W19, W22, and W33 ("W"= white tag) have been acclimating to their new surroundings and new wild condor friends quite well. We allowed condor Or8 into the flight pen of the release facility for a week to provide mentoring to these young birds. All of the wild condors have shown a keen interest in the newcomers, nibbling beaks with them through the flight pen fence on many occasions. We plan to allow as many of the wild condors as possible into the flight pen for brief mentoring periods prior to the white tag release in late March. This will allow the white tags the opportunity to develop valuable social bonds with the wild flock prior to release.

In late January we will be transporting 3 additional condors -- W31, W30, and an adult mentor condor, Honewuit, from the Los Angeles Zoo to join W19, W22, and W33 in Big Sur. Honewuit is an eight-year-old male who mentored in 1998 for the yellow tags prior to their release. He was a great teacher/mentor for the yellow tags, and we are excited about

his return to mentor the white tags.

The weather in Big Sur was very summer-like for December, providing the wild flock of 14 condors with excellent flying conditions. The December movement range for the Big Sur flock extended approximately 15 miles northeast of the release site along the coastal mountains. The blue (B61, B64, B67, B70, B71) and yellow (Y68, Y90, Y92, Y94) tagged condors would travel the length of this range as many as 4 times in a single day, a distance of 60 miles. The younger and more conservative orange tags (Or99, Or4, Or8, Or9, Or12) traveled the length of this range on a few occasions and only if the weather was exceptionally good.

The best condor viewing opportunities continue to be in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park on Valley View and Buzzards Roost trails. Keep a close watch on the surrounding ridgelines and redwood treetops.

Until next time...

--Joe Burnett, Field Supervisor

Notes from the Field, November 2000:

The Ventana Wildlife Society conducted four aerial tracking flights over central and southern California during the month of November. The first tracking flight on November 8 located B61 in the Sespe Condor Sanctuary near Hopper Mountain with four condors from southern California. The Sespe Condor Sanctuary (88,000 acres) was established in 1947 by the U.S. Forest service to protect critical nesting habitat for the condor. The Sespe was one of the last nesting area strongholds for the wild population prior to 1987. Although too young to breed, B61's visit to this historic nesting area is very noteworthy.

Other significant tracking information was revealed by the first flight. Y92 was found at Cuesta Pass near San Luis Obispo and Y94 was located just north near San Simeon State Park. After receiving this information, Ventana Wildlife Society biologists Jessica Steffen and Ross Conover visited these locations. They observed Y94 soaring with turkey vultures near San Simeon State Park, but were unable to get a visual on Y92 due to limited access to private lands. Cattle are plentiful over much of this area. Both condors possibly scavenged food but no feedings were confirmed.

The remaining flights for November confirmed the locations of the Big Sur flock, except Y92, in the vicinity of the release site. Y92 returned to the release site on November 27 after spending three weeks in San Luis Obispo and southern California.

The young orange-tagged condors spent the month close to home, never flying more than 15 miles from the release site. Multiple interactions were observed between the orange-tags and a male golden eagle around carcasses. The young orange-tags strongly defended the carcasses from the quick and stealthy attacks of the golden eagle. Outnumbered by condors, the golden eagle didn't stand much of a chance.

The best condor watching spots for December will be Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park's Valley View Trail and Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park's Ewoldsen Trail.

Until next month...

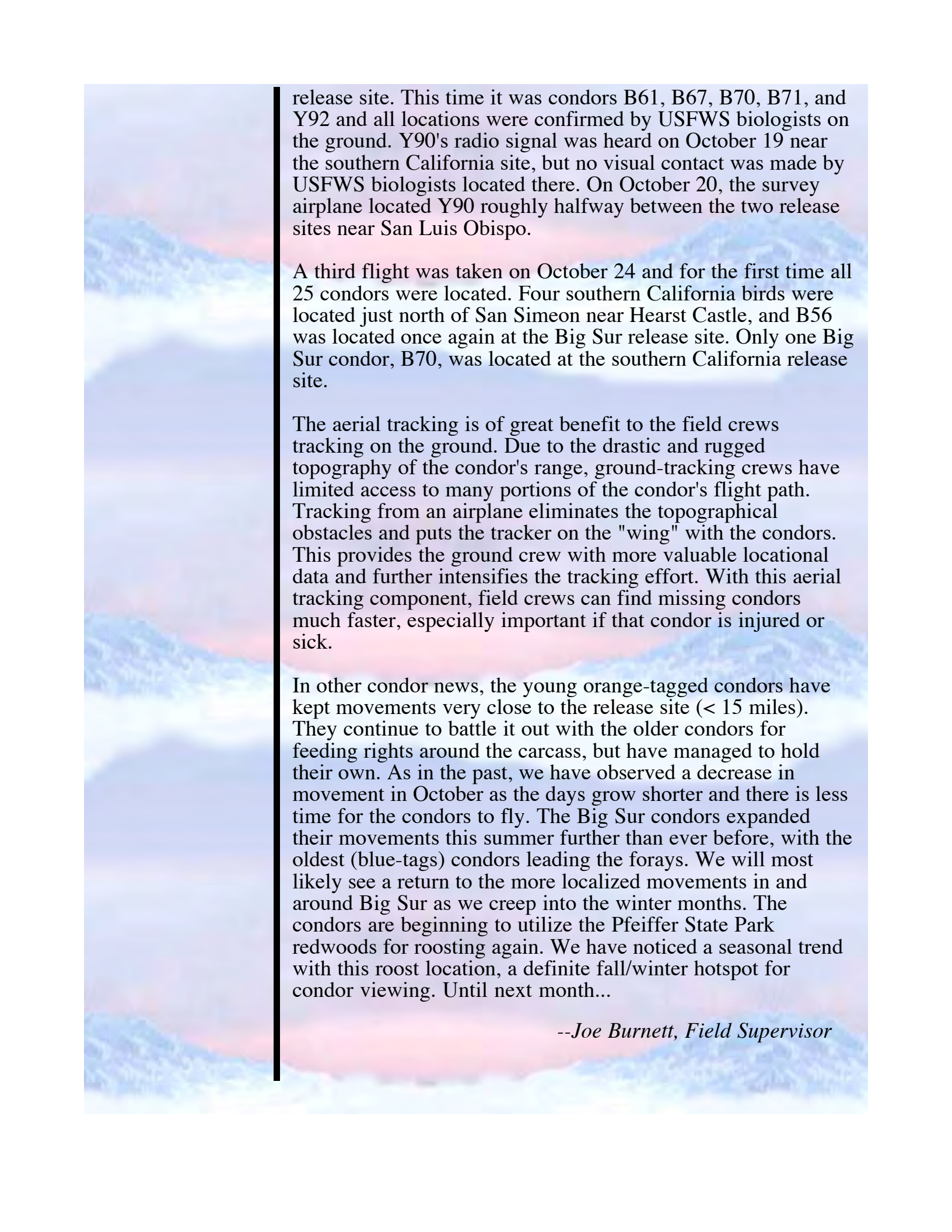
--Joe Burnett, Field Supervisor

Notes from the Field, October 2000:

The Ventana Wildlife Society conducted three aerial radio tracking flights for the entire California population of 25 condors (Big Sur-14, So Cal -11) this month. The aerial tracking survey area starts north of Big Sur, CA in Watsonville and goes down the Santa Lucia Mountain Range through San Luis Obispo and into the San Rafael Wilderness area over the Sisqouc Condor Sanctuary. The survey airplane, a Cessna 182, then goes east toward Lake Isabella over the West side of the Tehachapi range and heads back north up the Carrizo Plain through the Salinas Valley and back to Watsonville.

The first survey flight on October 13 located 23 of 25 condors. Two Big Sur condors, B61 and B70, were located very close to the southern California release site. Black-tagged condor 56, from the southern population, was located at the Big Sur release site. This was confirmed by Ventana Wildlife Society biologists who observed B56 feeding with the Big Sur condors near the release site just days before the first flight.

The second flight on October 20 located 24 of 25 condors. Again, Big Sur condors were located at the southern California



release site. This time it was condors B61, B67, B70, B71, and Y92 and all locations were confirmed by USFWS biologists on the ground. Y90's radio signal was heard on October 19 near the southern California site, but no visual contact was made by USFWS biologists located there. On October 20, the survey airplane located Y90 roughly halfway between the two release sites near San Luis Obispo.

A third flight was taken on October 24 and for the first time all 25 condors were located. Four southern California birds were located just north of San Simeon near Hearst Castle, and B56 was located once again at the Big Sur release site. Only one Big Sur condor, B70, was located at the southern California release site.

The aerial tracking is of great benefit to the field crews tracking on the ground. Due to the drastic and rugged topography of the condor's range, ground-tracking crews have limited access to many portions of the condor's flight path. Tracking from an airplane eliminates the topographical obstacles and puts the tracker on the "wing" with the condors. This provides the ground crew with more valuable locational data and further intensifies the tracking effort. With this aerial tracking component, field crews can find missing condors much faster, especially important if that condor is injured or sick.

In other condor news, the young orange-tagged condors have kept movements very close to the release site (< 15 miles). They continue to battle it out with the older condors for feeding rights around the carcass, but have managed to hold their own. As in the past, we have observed a decrease in movement in October as the days grow shorter and there is less time for the condors to fly. The Big Sur condors expanded their movements this summer further than ever before, with the oldest (blue-tags) condors leading the forays. We will most likely see a return to the more localized movements in and around Big Sur as we creep into the winter months. The condors are beginning to utilize the Pfeiffer State Park redwoods for roosting again. We have noticed a seasonal trend with this roost location, a definite fall/winter hotspot for condor viewing. Until next month...

--Joe Burnett, Field Supervisor

Notes from the Field, September 2000:

A note from Joe Burnett, Field Supervisor:

The "notes from the field" are reported monthly by myself and the seasonal field staff. Mason Adams is the current field assistant and Jessica Steffen and Katie Hughes are the current field interns. As a crew we note all observations that occurred for the preceding month and summarize them into a web update. This can be a daunting task at times given the amount of activity a single condor can do in one month's time. We have received enthusiastic feedback from our Internet readers and we look forward to bringing you more updates in the months to come.

And now for this month's update...

In early September we successfully captured the remainder of the Big Sur condors for routine blood/lead testing and radio transmitter replacement. Blood/lead results, via the portable blood/lead analyzer (thank you USFWS for the loaner), for the Big Sur condors were below normal for the most part. Condor B64 had a slightly elevated blood/lead level of 59.5 ug/dl, but still below the hazardous levels >65.0 ug/dl. All other birds were recorded to have blood/lead levels lower than B64's value. The portable blood/lead analyzer allows our field crew to get results in five minutes while lab results take 3-5 days. The portable analyzer unit will be tested for its accuracy by comparing analyzer results with lab results. If accurate, the portable analyzer will become a field standard in detecting high blood/lead levels earlier in wild condors.

All fourteen condors were re-released into the wild shortly after their capture based on low levels detected by the portable analyzer. We felt the risk to B64 was low considering he had been in the flight pen feeding on non-lead food 3 days prior to his blood/lead test.

Movements of greater than 150 miles were restricted to the blue tags, Y68, Y92, and Y94. These eight did not make the journey to southern California as a group; they were either alone or in small groups. Y90 and the orange tags remained close to Big Sur for most of the month. Or99 made his furthest journey north of the release site to date. He flew approximately 25 miles north to Bixby Creek in the company of 20 turkey

vultures. We saw a similar association with turkey vultures in condor Y94. To our knowledge, Y94 has discovered more wild carcasses than any other Big Sur condor.

Your best condor viewing opportunities will be at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park (Ewoldsen Trail) and Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park (Buzzard's Roost Trail). Until next month...

Notes from the Field, August 2000:

Temperatures soared into the triple digits this month. Condors Y92, B61, B64, B67, B70, and B71 spent a majority of the daylight hours on the wing, soaring along the ridge tops between Big Sur and the Sierra Madres in southern California. The rest of the Big Sur group concentrated activities on a short stretch of beach along the coast, the same beach where they discovered a sea lion carcass last month.

In response to the fatal lead poisonings of three Arizona condors in June 2000, we decided to recapture the Big Sur condors for blood/lead testing. On August 15, Y90 and the orange tags were captured and transferred to our rearing and release facility. Blood samples for these six condors tested very low and at non-threatening levels for lead. We will hold Y90 and the orange tags in the facility until we capture the rest of the Big Sur group.

As of August 31, we recaptured Y92, Y94, and Y68, but still no blue tags. Note: B71 was captured at the beginning of August by USFWS biologists during their routine trap-up for blood/lead testing; she also tested low for lead.

We discovered, with the help of a local Big Sur resident, a commercially available motion-activated water sprinkler. The sprinkler, called a "scarecrow sprinkler", is designed to keep deer/dogs/cats or any other animal out of gardens and flowerbeds. Upon approach the motion sensor activates a sprinkler that turns on for five seconds, using very little water, and then turns off. The water shoots out 25-30 feet over a 120 degree area. We recently tested the scarecrow on the rooftop of a residence the condors have been observed landing on. After installation of the scarecrow on the roof, landings by the condors rapidly diminished, and as of August 31 the local

homeowner reported observing no roof landings. You can check out the scarecrow sprinkler at www.scatmat.com

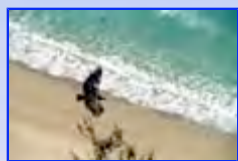
The best condor watching locations are Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park ("Buzzard's roost trail") and Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park ("Ewoldsen trail").

Notes from the Field, July 2000:



The big news this month is that the orange-tagged condors found a sea lion carcass on a beach south of Big Sur. The carcass was located just north of a ravine that the orange-tags have been using as a source of fresh water for the past few months.

We are not sure exactly when the large sea mammal washed up, but Molly Church observed all the orange-tags perched on rocks overlooking it on the 9th. A coyote was seen on the carcass that first day, but it never came back after that. It took a few days for the condors to finally come down off the cliffs. After that, there was another delay of a couple days while the birds played on the beach. Like young children seeing the ocean for the first time, the orange-tags, joined by Y68 and Y90 now, seemed to delight in picking at kelp, walking near the waves, flushing Turkey Vultures and drinking from a spring they discovered.



After several days of play, the condors finally got down to business and started eating the sea lion carcass. The feeding was tentative throughout the following days. This sea lion carcass, high in fat content, was the first sea mammal found by the orange tags, Y68 and Y90. Y94, who has fed on sea mammals before, also fed on this carcass.

There has always been concern regarding the occurrence of lead in wild carcasses. Recent poisonings in the Arizona condor population have further escalated this concern. Thus, a tissue sample was taken from the sea lion carcass by Joe Burnett & Jessica Steffan and analyzed by Dr. Mike Murray, our project veterinarian. No lead or other toxic substances were found.

The location of the sea lion has put the condors in relatively close proximity to coastal Highway 1. As a result, we have had several instances where passing motorists have seen and approached the birds, at times getting within 50 feet before field staff could intervene. One of the major obstacles in the recovery program is preventing the reintroduced condors from getting acclimated to the presence or approach of humans. If you do happen to spot the birds, please do not approach them. The best way to observe the condors, both for their and your safety, is from 100 feet or more and for short periods of time.

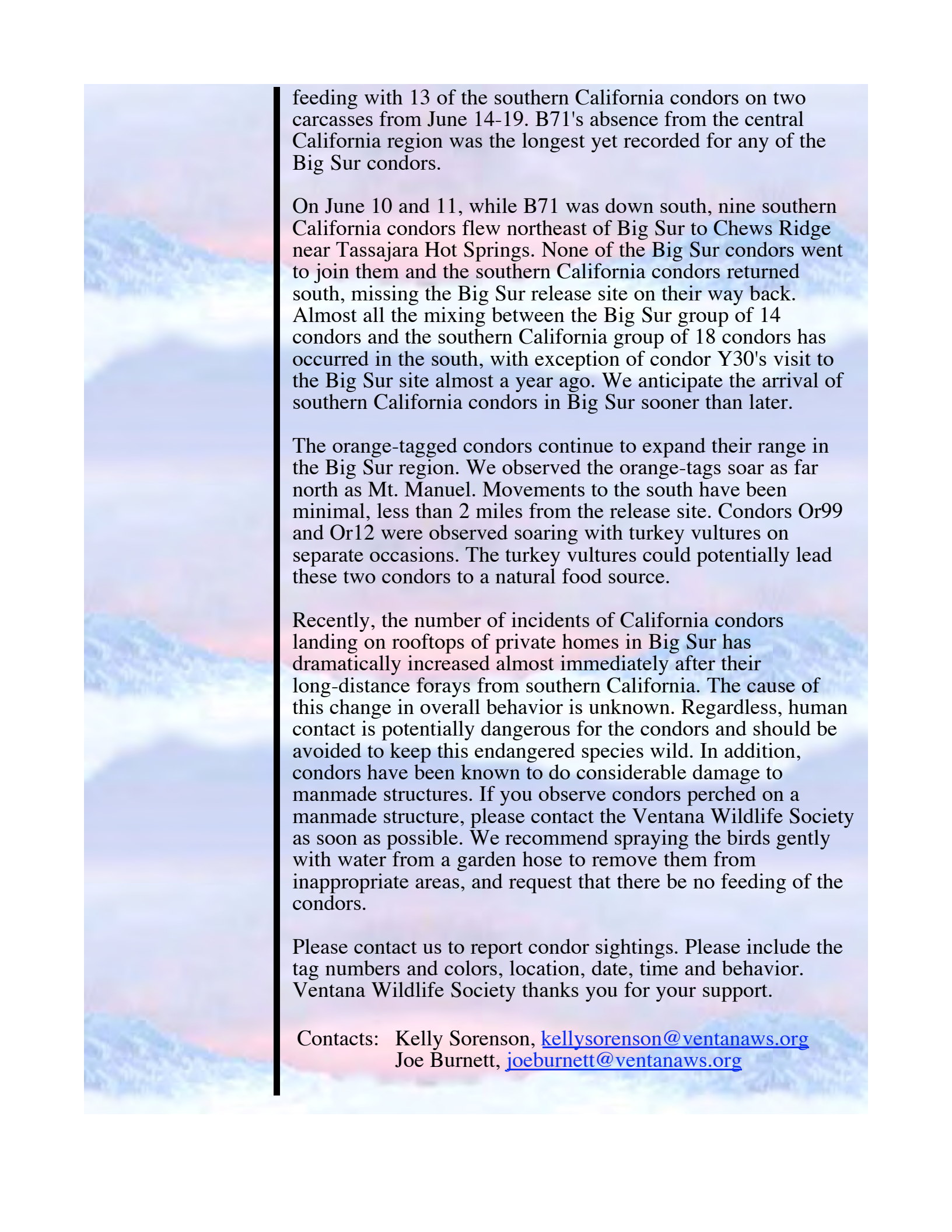
The blue-tags have continued to fly back and forth between Big Sur and southwest Kern County. USFWS biologists observed B70 and B71 feeding with 16 condors from southern population in Santa Barbara County. Condor B71 spent the latter half of the month in Big Sur, a big change from May and June, where she spent most of her time in southern California.

As of July 31, a fire is burning 15 miles south of the Big Sur condor release site in the southern Los Padres National Forest near Fort Hunter Liggett. The fire is 80% contained and moving in a southeasterly direction away from the release site. The expected control date for the fire is August 8, 2000. We don't expect this to be as threatening as the Sept/October '99 fire in which we had to evacuate 3 condors from the release site. See the [Sept/October '99 Condor Field Notes](#) for details of that evacuation.

Notes from the Field, June 2000:

The condors are taking advantage of the long, hot days of summer to explore central and southern California. Summer conditions increase thermal activity and provide the "fuel" for condor flight. Columns of rising hot air, called thermals, act as invisible elevators for the birds. The condors spent a majority of the daylight hours this month soaring from thermal to thermal.

The older, more experienced condors are still traveling the furthest distances and for longer periods than the younger ones. Condor B71 flew to southern California near Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, approximately 150 miles, on June 5 and she remained in that area until June 24. B71 was observed



feeding with 13 of the southern California condors on two carcasses from June 14-19. B71's absence from the central California region was the longest yet recorded for any of the Big Sur condors.

On June 10 and 11, while B71 was down south, nine southern California condors flew northeast of Big Sur to Chews Ridge near Tassajara Hot Springs. None of the Big Sur condors went to join them and the southern California condors returned south, missing the Big Sur release site on their way back. Almost all the mixing between the Big Sur group of 14 condors and the southern California group of 18 condors has occurred in the south, with exception of condor Y30's visit to the Big Sur site almost a year ago. We anticipate the arrival of southern California condors in Big Sur sooner than later.

The orange-tagged condors continue to expand their range in the Big Sur region. We observed the orange-tags soar as far north as Mt. Manuel. Movements to the south have been minimal, less than 2 miles from the release site. Condors Or99 and Or12 were observed soaring with turkey vultures on separate occasions. The turkey vultures could potentially lead these two condors to a natural food source.

Recently, the number of incidents of California condors landing on rooftops of private homes in Big Sur has dramatically increased almost immediately after their long-distance forays from southern California. The cause of this change in overall behavior is unknown. Regardless, human contact is potentially dangerous for the condors and should be avoided to keep this endangered species wild. In addition, condors have been known to do considerable damage to manmade structures. If you observe condors perched on a manmade structure, please contact the Ventana Wildlife Society as soon as possible. We recommend spraying the birds gently with water from a garden hose to remove them from inappropriate areas, and request that there be no feeding of the condors.

Please contact us to report condor sightings. Please include the tag numbers and colors, location, date, time and behavior. Ventana Wildlife Society thanks you for your support.

Contacts: Kelly Sorenson, kellysorenson@ventanaws.org
Joe Burnett, joeburnett@ventanaws.org

Notes from the Field, May 2000:

The Big Sur condors reached two milestones this month. The blue- and yellow-tagged condors traveled further than ever before and orange-tagged condors Or99 and Or4 found a wild carcass earlier than any condor previously released in Big Sur.

On May 12, 2000 VWS condor biologist Marylise Lefevre discovered Or99 and Or4 feeding on a small, stillborn deer in the upper portion of Slide Canyon near Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park. They located the carcass approximately 600 feet upslope from the Slide Canyon creek site the orange tags frequently visit to drink and bathe. Or99 and Or4 consumed the deer carcass the same day, leaving only the hide and skeletal remains. The other orange-tags (Or8, Or9 and Or12) did not discover this carcass, but continue to feed on supplemental carcasses at the release site and visit the slide canyon creek site to drink and bathe. Condor B70 followed the young orange-tags to Slide Canyon and stayed with them briefly before flying north to the Big Sur Valley. This was the first time any of the older condors had followed the orange-tags to this site.

In early May B61, B64, and B71 flew 150 miles to southern California near Frazier Mountain. This was B64's first trip this far south and the second for B61 and B71. Later in May B67, Y68, Y92, and Y94 made the journey to the Frazier Mountain area and were later joined by B61, B64, B70 and B71. Six Big Sur condors (B64, B67, B71, Y68, Y92, and Y94) were observed by USFWS condor biologists feeding on a stillborn calf carcass at Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge with a group of the southern California condors. Y90 and the orange-tags are the only Big Sur condors that haven't flown to southern California.

On a return flight to Big Sur from southern California, condor B70 was observed briefly on Hearst Ranch by Hearst family and friends near Burnett Peak. Condors are naturally curious animals. This curiosity is in part how they might discover a carcass. For example, we observed condors B64 and B71 investigate a group of turkey vultures gathered at a sea mammal carcass along the shoreline. B64 and B71 were rewarded with a meal after curiously taking a closer look.

Without parents for guidance these young condors are left with the task of figuring out what forms of curiosity are appropriate when investigating different types of ground activities. B70's curious investigation of a small group of people located along a ridge top on Memorial Day weekend is a good example of the crossover that occurs between condors and humans in the natural world. B70 was investigating a group of folks gathered at a campsite on a very isolated ridge top that is rarely occupied by people. In this rare instance his curiosity went without reward and he left the area after only a few minutes of investigation. The folks gathered at this campsite responded appropriately to B70, they did not attempt to feed or approach the young condor and let him be on his way. They also contacted us at our field office immediately after the incident occurred.

Please contact us at (831) 624-1202 if you observe condors in the wild. Record the wing tag color and number of the condor and details of the incident (time, location, behavior of condor). We will respond to all sighting reports ASAP.

Condor Watching Hot Spots: Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park.

Notes from the Field, April 2000:

Condors B61 and B71, last seen in Big Sur on April Fool's Day (April 1, 2000), were located by USFWS biologists in southern California near Frazier Mountain on April 5, 2000. B61 and B71 were observed flying and perching with as many as 10 USFWS condors at a time. This 150 + mile flight (one-way!!) marks the longest journey to date by the Big Sur condors. B61 and B71 returned to Big Sur on April 8 to rejoin the other blue, yellow, and orange tagged birds.

On April 27 Ventana Wildlife Society biologists transferred Or200 to the USFWS release site in southern California. Or200 was recaptured in Big Sur shortly after release in early March due to behavioral problems. She was paired up with USFWS condor B1 to allow her more socialization time and both will be re-released in early May from the southern California site. She fed with condor B1 almost immediately after being placed in the release pen and only a couple of days later was observed nuzzling heads with her new penmate.

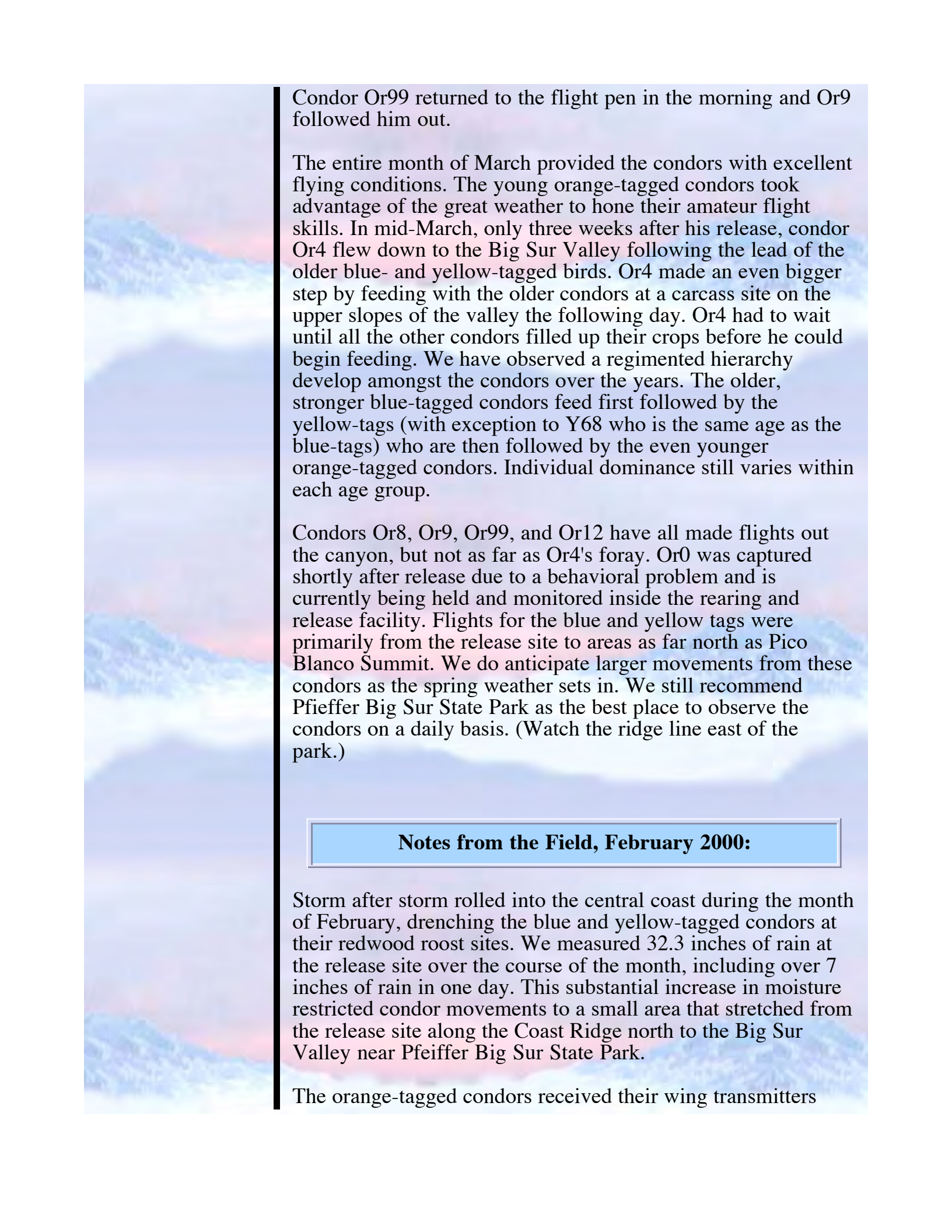
Our newly released orange-tags (Or4, Or8, Or9, Or12, and Or99) continue to explore the local Big Sur landscape. On April 5 VWS condor biologist Mason Adams tracked the orange-tags to an isolated coastal canyon and discovered the young condors drinking and bathing in a small stream. This was the first time we have observed Big Sur condors at a natural water source. (Note: The USFWS have also observed the southern California population of condors at natural water sources on several occasions.) The young orange-tags are now making routine trips down to this watering hole. We have yet to see any of the older blue or yellow tagged condors follow them to this spot.

Condor AC-8, re-released last month in southern California, has been slowly reestablishing her old ways. Her movements are being monitored via a satellite transmitter attached to her wing. The satellite location data has revealed that she has revisited parts of her original foraging range. USFWS biologists have not observed the younger condors follow her to these locations, but anticipate it will happen within the next couple of months. AC-8 can be identified in the field by a blue tag with a white number 12.

The best bet for observing condors in Big Sur is at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. Good Luck and don't forget your binoculars!!

Notes from the Field, March 2000:

On March 4, six condors awaited their release from the David P. Usher Rearing and Release Facility under a thick blanket of coastal fog. At approximately 12 PM Marylise Lefevre, VWS Condor Rearing Specialist, pulled the rope to open the outside door of the flight pen. Condor Or12 was the closest to the door and she began to peer into this new opening. She was then spooked off her position by Or4, leaving Or0 the next closest condor to the door. Or0 slowly approached the opening and stood at the brink of her first free-flight. Or0 took one last gaze back into the flight pen at the others and then spread her wings and leaped into the air. Her first flight carried her south around the front of the flight pen where she ended up landing on the release slope. One by one, the others approached the doorway and flew out. Or0 was followed by Or12, Or4, Or99, and Or8. Condor Or9 did not to leave until the following morning.



Condor Or99 returned to the flight pen in the morning and Or9 followed him out.

The entire month of March provided the condors with excellent flying conditions. The young orange-tagged condors took advantage of the great weather to hone their amateur flight skills. In mid-March, only three weeks after his release, condor Or4 flew down to the Big Sur Valley following the lead of the older blue- and yellow-tagged birds. Or4 made an even bigger step by feeding with the older condors at a carcass site on the upper slopes of the valley the following day. Or4 had to wait until all the other condors filled up their crops before he could begin feeding. We have observed a regimented hierarchy develop amongst the condors over the years. The older, stronger blue-tagged condors feed first followed by the yellow-tags (with exception to Y68 who is the same age as the blue-tags) who are then followed by the even younger orange-tagged condors. Individual dominance still varies within each age group.

Condors Or8, Or9, Or99, and Or12 have all made flights out the canyon, but not as far as Or4's foray. Or0 was captured shortly after release due to a behavioral problem and is currently being held and monitored inside the rearing and release facility. Flights for the blue and yellow tags were primarily from the release site to areas as far north as Pico Blanco Summit. We do anticipate larger movements from these condors as the spring weather sets in. We still recommend Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park as the best place to observe the condors on a daily basis. (Watch the ridge line east of the park.)

Notes from the Field, February 2000:

Storm after storm rolled into the central coast during the month of February, drenching the blue and yellow-tagged condors at their redwood roost sites. We measured 32.3 inches of rain at the release site over the course of the month, including over 7 inches of rain in one day. This substantial increase in moisture restricted condor movements to a small area that stretched from the release site along the Coast Ridge north to the Big Sur Valley near Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park.

The orange-tagged condors received their wing transmitters

early in the month. These transmitters will allow the field crew to track and monitor the birds' progress after release, just as they do with the blue and yellow-tagged condors. In addition, we also extracted blood from each condor to check for any potential health problems. The process of tagging and applying the transmitters also serves as "human aversion" training for the young condors. The negative experience will reinforce their fear of humans, which isn't always intrinsic to them at first.

Condor Y90 was released from the flight pen at the same time we trapped up the orange-tagged condors for transmitters. Y90 received some brief human aversion training before he was released. In the days following his release, Y90 reunited with his wild counterparts and spent the remainder of the month feeding and roosting with them.

After Y90's departure as mentor, the social structure among the orange-tags changed quite a bit. Or99 stepped up to replace Y90 as the dominant condor, mimicking the older birds' behavior along the way. Or99 could maintain that role for only so long before reverting to his playful and chick-like behavior with the others.

Condor Viewing Hotspot (roost site): Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park (Valley View Trail)

Notes from the Field, January 2000:

January finally brought winter to Big Sur and, with it, three storms which kept the condors roost-bound for days on end. When the weather cleared up most of the movement by the condors was between the release site and Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. The blue- and yellow-tagged birds continue to locate and feed on supplemental carcasses placed in the area around Pfeiffer State Park and have spent multiple nights roosting there.

The condors seemed less interested in feeding this month than they have been at other times of the year. Some of the birds voluntarily went long stretches without eating at all. Condor B70 waited 13 days before finally feeding again. A pair of Golden Eagles continue to visit feeding areas near the release site. The orange-tagged condors attentively watch the aerial acrobats and ground combat between the eagles and the blue-

and yellow tagged condors from the safe confines of the flight pen of the rearing and release facility. This kind of visual mentoring by wild condors will be very beneficial to the young, inexperienced orange-tags after their release into the wild.

We also observed a bobcat feeding on a carcass near the release site this month. The bobcat would visit the carcass multiple times throughout the day. Sometimes the bobcat would not feed, but instead just sit by the carcass as if guarding it from the condors, who flew low over the bobcat's head at times. On one occasion we observed the bobcat pulling grass over the carcass to cover it up. Bobcats are known to cache their food, but this cache didn't stand much of a chance. The cat was out of the bag and the condors were well aware of its presence underneath the grass. Although aware of the hidden carcass, the condors remained cautious and would not approach if the bobcat was in the area. A combination of the bobcat, golden eagles and winter weather have made feeding much more challenging for the birds this month. None-the-less, the wild condors continue to hurdle nature's obstacles, gaining valuable experience and growing stronger with each new day.

The orange-tagged condors continue to broaden their socialization with one another. We have not observed the orange-tags feed as a group yet, but we have seen them at least feed with one or two other birds. Condor Or0, the smallest of the group at 16 lbs., has been observed feeding with current mentor Y90 on many occasions, but rarely with the others. Condor Or0 has shown a keen interest in other wild mentors as well. She was observed nibbling beaks through the flight pen fence with condors B61, Y92, and Y94. Although the orange-tags have some minor social kinks that still need to be worked out, we anticipate that they will be feeding as a group by the scheduled release time on February 26, 2000.

Condor viewing spots: Valley View Trail in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, and Highway 1 (pull-outs just south of Grimes Point).

Ventana Wildlife Society
19045 Portola Dr. Ste. F-1
Salinas, CA 93908

Phone 831-455-9514
Fax 831-455-2846
E-mail info@ventanaws.org

Illustrations copyright © 2002 Stan Russell and Ventana Wildlife Society
Last updated February 1, 2002

