



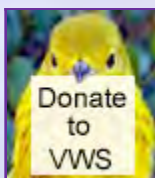
Ventana Wildlife Society CONDOR REINTRODUCTION NOTES FROM THE FIELD, 2002



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- [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](#)
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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; White - April 5, 2001, Red - December 12, 2002. Individual condors are identified by the first letter of the color (or first two letters, in the case of Orange-tags), followed by a number. For example, Y92 is a yellow-tag and Or99 is an orange-tag.

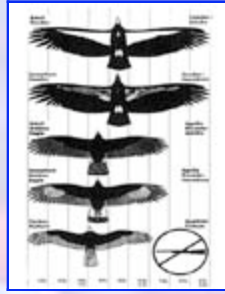
Notes from the Field, December 2002:

Excitement filled the air in Big Sur throughout the month of December, despite the inclement weather which soaked the condor release site with an 'above normal' amount of rain. The excitement took flight on December 12, 2002, when seven condors (R36, R42, R51, R54, R56, R60, and *Y79) made their first flights into the wild. This was the first time a handful of lucky folks from the general public were able to participate in releasing condors into the wild. All the condors released that day took amazing first flights, much to the amazement of the crowd gathered on the ridge above the release site.



December 12 is a significant date to the Big Sur condors; this was the same date we chose to release the first successful batch of condors, the blue tags, back in 1997. So far, we have seen similar success with the newest batch, the red tags. All but one, R51, have successfully fed since their release. Led by the older and experienced wild condors, these young condors are exposed to and influenced by more wild condor mentors than any other previous release group in Big Sur.

Shortly after release the condor excitement continued to unfold before our very eyes. While watching the young red tags make their adjustments to life in the wild, the field team made another astonishing observation. They observed condors B64 and B71 conducting courtship displays and copulation attempts in plain view at the release site. The frequency of their courtship activities has increased since these initial observations. We are all very excited at the probability that B64 and B71 will attempt to nest this spring in Big Sur. This would be yet another first for the Big Sur flock, and the first condor nest in Monterey County in approximately 100 years.



We look forward to more growth and excitement in 2003. The Big Sur condor population has grown to 23 and the potential for a nesting pair amongst the flock is very high. Despite the loss of two condors (W33 and Or12) this past year, we can only hope for a year as rewarding as 2002.



The best condor viewing can be found at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park redwood groves in the morning and afternoons. Good luck, until next time....

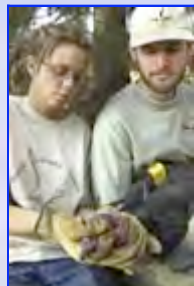
--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, November 2002:

The last two months we have observed an increased condor presence in the mountains surrounding San Luis Obispo and Atascadero. A large number of resident turkey vultures cruise and forage in this area giving the condors good reason to hang around and look for an easy meal. On November 30, Condor Or12 (3 1/2 year old female) paid the ultimate price when she was electrocuted by power lines as she went to feed on a deer carcass in the Atascadero foothills. The loss of condor Or12 is a hard one to take, as she had been doing incredibly well in the wild since her release from Big Sur in February of 2000. Her contributions to the Big Sur flock will never be forgotten.



On an up note, condor Or99's blood-lead level continues to go down and we plan to release him back into the wild in early December. Condor Or99 was captured and held for treatment last month after he tested for high blood-lead concentrations.



We successfully captured two more condors, B64 and B71, from the Big Sur population in early November. Much to our relief, both condors had low lead levels and received new radio transmitters. B64 and B71 are rarely apart in the wild, showing all the signs and signals of a pair bond. We hope to see courtship displays with this pair in the coming months and eventual nesting this spring.

Release day, 12 December 2002, is rapidly approaching for the six young chicks and 4-year old Y79, who are still residing in Ventana Wildlife Society's Big Sur release pen. These seven condors are more than ready to go, they have learned the necessary skills for life in the wild and we are eager to see them fly



free. The adult mentor condor, R63, will remain in the release pen as a "beacon" to the young condors after release, so they don't stray too far from home. His mentoring duties will continue after release and soon enough for the next batch of chicks which arrive mid January 2003.



The best condor viewing can be found at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park and Coast Highway One. At Pfeiffer, hike Mt. Manual (strenuous) or Valley View (moderate) Trails. Both of these trails not only can help you spot a condor, but also provide rewarding views of the Big Sur Valley and coast range. Driving south along highway one, stop at Vista Point pull-off, 1 mile north of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, and scan the coast and mountains for soaring condors. Good luck and don't forget binoculars....



--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, October 2002:



October proved to be a month of growth and loss for the California Condor. In southern California three nesting pairs of adults experienced the death of each of their chicks. One of the adult parents, W100, disappeared just before the death of his chick and has not been seen since. In Big Sur the population remains stable with a noticeable increase in wild foraging on deer carcasses. Deer carcasses shot by poachers pose the biggest health risk to condors. The lead bullet fragments and residue left in the deer carcasses can cause lead poisoning. High levels of lead exposure can result in the death of a condor, which has already occurred in the southern California and Arizona flocks.

To monitor lead exposure in the Big Sur flock, we recapture the condors twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall. If we're lucky, we'll catch a condor before the lead level in its blood becomes lethal. We can also conduct general physicals and change out radio tags that have expired during these recaptures.



We successfully trapped nine condors this month, including B67, B68, B70, Or99, Or4, Or9, Or12, W19, and W31. Once we capture a condor, we obtain a blood sample that is immediately processed on a field Blood-Lead Analyzer. The Analyzer will provide field staff with an immediate result and determine whether a condor needs further treatment for lead exposure. Eight of nine condors tested low on the analyzer and were set free back into the wild. That wasn't the case for condor Or99; his score was too high for the analyzer to read.





Or99 was immediately transferred to Dr. Mike Murray's Avian Clinic in Monterey for an extensive medical exam. First, a blood sample from Or99 was express mailed to a Louisiana lab to obtain an exact blood lead level. Second, under Dr. Murray's direction, we took a radiograph of Or99.

The radiograph would reveal any lead particulate that may still be in Or99's digestive tract. Much to our relief, the radiograph came back clear for Or99. Now we had to wait patiently for the lab results to arrive. In the meantime, we placed Or99 in our condor treatment facility at the Monterey SPCA.

The following day Or99's lab results finally arrived; his score was 80 mg/dl. Not a lethal level, but high enough to keep out the wild for closer observation at our Big Sur release pen. We will keep him in the release pen with the other chicks until his lead level drops to a normal and acceptable level.



We are currently working with Stanford University and the University of California at Santa Cruz to help determine the possible sources of the lead in the condors' diet (albeit lead ammunition, lead gasoline, lead paint, etc.) through lead isotope analysis of each wild condor's blood. We are optimistic these two studies will shed more light on the origins of lead in the condor diet.

The best condor viewing opportunities for November can be found at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. The Valley View Trail is a moderate level hike and Mt. Manuel Trail is a strenuous, but rewarding, hike that will also increase your chances of spotting a condor. Good luck, until next time....

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, September 2002:



The National Park Service provided helicopter service to assist the Ventana Wildlife Society in transporting condor pen materials to the new release site at Pinnacles National Monument. The successful operation took a full day and was a great collaborative effort between the National Park Service and Ventana



Wildlife Society. Construction at the new site will begin after all the permits are finally in place, which will be sometime in early October of 2002.

The Big Sur wild condor population is holding strong at 17 birds with 7 captive condors still awaiting release this winter. All the condors in the Big Sur



flock, with exception of W31, continue their large-scale movements to the southernmost extent of their range near Hopper Mountain Wildlife Refuge. Five condors from the Big Sur flock have been stopping over in the Atascadero/Paso Robles area, almost halfway between the Big Sur and Hopper Mountain release sites, to feed on wild carcasses. Local residents in Atascadero and Paso Robles observed condors B70, Or9, Y90, Y92, and Y94 feeding on two separate deer carcasses. Both deer were shot and killed illegally by poachers, greatly increasing the risk of lead poisoning to the condors which fed on those deer.



The condor field crew has kept a close track on these five condors, looking for any signs of physical distress typically associated with lead poisoning. If a condor gets a large dose of lead while feeding, death is almost certain for that bird. If the field crew can capture the condor before it reaches this fatal point, they can chelate the condor's blood to remove any harmful lead. Many condors from the southern flock have received chelation and it saved their lives, while a few others were found after it was too late. We hope to avoid the later predicament by keeping a close watch on the condors in the field, but sometimes that isn't even enough.

The captive flock currently residing at the Big Sur release pen has become a very cohesive group. Condor R63 continues his mentoring duties and adult influence over the entire group, honing their social etiquette. R63 will not get released with his student condors, but will remain in the flight pen as beacon to them after they are eventually released. Four-year-old Y79 has also fallen under R63's guidance and will soon be joining the Big Sur wild flock. The chicks have adjusted to Y79's presence as second in-charge and will benefit from his and R63's exposure when they are released at Pinnacles National Monument this winter.



The best condor viewing can be found on highway one from Big Sur to Lucia. Scan the beaches and surrounding ridgelines for condor activity. If you're up for a hike, try the Valley View Trail at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park or the Ewoldsen Trail at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park. Good luck and don't forget your binoculars...

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, August 2002:

August lived up to its hot reputation and delivered some sweltering days for the condors and the field crew. Temperatures broke the 100-degree mark in the release pen observation blind making for very long, sweaty days of note-taking for the field crew.

The condors handled the August heat very well, frequently bathing and "urohydrating" on their legs.



Urohydration is when a condor releases excrement (in the form of whitish liquid urates) onto its legs to help cool down. Definitely not for humans!



The big news this month came from Los Angeles Zoo. Condor Y79, a 4-year old male, was first released at our Big Sur site on January 30, 1999. He was recaptured shortly after his release on March 19, 1999, due to human-oriented behavior. His affinity with humans presented dangers to his own well-being as well as influencing the rest of the flock. The last 3 years he has been residing at the Los Angeles Zoo's Captive Breeding Facility and during that time has shown an improvement in behavior and flees at the site of people. Based on these behavioral changes, Ventana Wildlife Society decided that Y79 deserved another shot at life in the wild and on August 13, 2002, he was transferred from the Los Angeles Zoo to our Big Sur release pen.



Upon his entry into the flight pen, condor Y79 was quickly greeted by adult mentor condor, R63. R63, a ten-year old male, swiftly established dominance over Y79 and Y79 obliged.



Condor Y79 then swiftly greeted the six young chicks and established dominance. The chicks reluctantly accepted Y79's dominance, but didn't have much of a say in the matter anyway. We are anticipating re-releasing Y79 in early October of this year and we are hopeful his behavioral change will be enough to keep him out in the wild.



In other news, condor B71 was located by satellite in the southern sierras, approximately 300 miles away. That is the furthest any of the condors have ever flown from our Big Sur release site. Condor B71 has since returned to Big Sur from that record-breaking journey. The remainder of the flock keeps on the move between southern California and Big Sur. Condor W31, a two-year old female, is the only condor from the Big Sur flock that has yet to make the 200-mile flight to southern California.

The best condor viewing can be found at both Pfeiffer Big Sur and Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Parks. Scan the surrounding ridgelines and keep an eye out as you cruise along the coast highway between the two State Parks. Good luck...until next time.

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, July 2002:

 The Big Sur condor flock celebrated their independence



this July by discovering a wild sea lion carcass along the coast. Condors B64, B67, B68, Or4, Or99, Or8, Or12, and W31 gathered for the oceanside feast that lasted almost a week. As anticipated, the Big Sur coastline is slowly, but surely, becoming a routine foraging zone for the condors.

After the excitement of the feeding, a good portion of the Big Sur flock flew south 200 miles to Hopper Mtn. Wildlife Refuge. Only W31, Or4, and Or99 remained in Big Sur and had the whole coast to themselves. These three took some nice flights north into the backcountry around Pico Blanco and Bixby Mtn., returning on occasion to the release site to visit the chicks in the flight pen or to feed on a carcass.



An emergency evacuation of condor R36 took place mid-July after biologists Marylise Lefevre and Jen Gamber discovered an injury to R36's left eye. After carefully isolating R36 from the other chicks in the flight pen, we safely captured and transported her to Dr. Mike Murray's animal clinic in Monterey, Ca. Upon examination of R36's eye, Dr. Murray

discovered two foxtail grass seeds lodged under her lower eyelid. He carefully removed the foxtails and R36 was soon on her way back to the release site to reunite with the other chicks. We are happy to report that R36 has recovered fully from her injury and she is in great health, as are the other chicks and adult mentor, R63.

In other news, the three condor chicks currently being reared in the wild in southern California are doing very well. They are growing fast and being fed often. The oldest of the chicks will soon be able to leave the nest cave and make short flights with its parents. The other two chicks are slightly behind, but will soon follow the same path. Note -- The three nest sites this year were established by condors released in southern California, not Big Sur. The Big Sur flock is due to begin nesting this coming Spring of 2003 when our oldest condors, the blue tags, reach breeding age (six years old).

The best condor viewing can be found at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park at the coast or inland on the Ewoldsen Trail. Condor watching tip -- All condors in Big Sur have ID number tags on their wings. Good luck!!

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, June 2002:



June started out pretty slow in Big Sur with only a handful of condors remaining in the release area. A large contingent of the Big Sur flock were gracing the skies of southern California, 200 miles south. While in southern California the Big Sur flock managed to find a few carcasses and feed with some

of their condor cousins from the southern flock.

Three pair of condors from the southern flock are currently tending to their chicks, all of which are growing fast and being fed on a routine basis. Following instinct alone, these "first-time" condor parents have figured out how to raise chicks of their own. Breaching yet another milestone in the successful and steady recovery of their species.



We did not observe breeding behavior amongst the Big Sur flock this month. Breeding-related behaviors are rare this time of year and tend to pick up in late fall/early winter.



On a down note, condor W33 has now been missing for six weeks. She was last seen in Big Sur on May 17, 2002, and all attempts to locate her radio signal on the ground or by air have been unsuccessful. The Big Sur wild population now stands at 17 with 6 additional condors in our release pen awaiting release this fall.

The six young condors in our release pen continue to do very well as they prepare for life in the wild. Their adult mentor, R63, keeps a dominant eye on their progress, reminding them daily of who "rules their roost." In the coming months we will begin to allow condors from the wild flock into the release pen to assist R63 with mentoring.



Just when we thought it couldn't get any quieter this month in terms of condor activity, a whole swoop of condors came back to Big Sur. Condor B61

and Y92 were among the group that returned. These two females have been strangers to the Big Sur release site since discovering the southern flock. Or4, Or99, Or8, and Or12 not only returned to their Big Sur home, but proceeded to a cliff-side beach area to investigate a potential marine-mammal carcass. Due to the distance from where we can observe this location, we haven't been able to confirm a wild feeding.



The best condor viewing for July can be found on roadside pullouts along highway one between Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park and Limekiln State Park. The Ewoldsen loop trail at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park is a good bet. Stop at open areas along this trail and scan the surrounding ridgelines for large soaring birds. Until next month...

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, May 2002:

May 2002 was fairly quiet on the central coast as most of the Big Sur flock

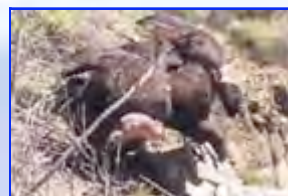
spent a good portion of the month down in southern California in the vicinity of the three active condor nest sites. More great news from down south -- another wild chick successfully hatched this month in the second nest site and the third nest is expecting an egg to hatch very soon. The first nest site's chick, which hatched last month, is growing fast and is already the size of a small turkey! The condor parents at all three nests are doing a remarkable job.

Speaking of chicks, the Big Sur chicks ("the red-tags") are now a year old and just about full-grown. They continue to flourish inside the flight pen with their adult mentor, R63. R63's mentoring duties are getting a bit easier as these young condors hone their social and physical skills. One young condor, R60, has finally integrated into the group and feeds regularly with the others. A key step for any young condor being introduced to the wild.



Despite the absence of 12 Big Sur condors most of the month, the 6 condors that remained near the release site were very active. We continued to observe condors returning to areas on the coast where they had found wild carcasses in the past. We also observed condors W31 and W33 head south into San Simeon and San Luis Obispo.

At the end of May we were caught off guard when 6 of the 12 condors- B64, B67, B68, Y94, Or4, and Or9, returned to Big Sur. The weather conditions turned very summer-like at the end of May and possibly facilitated the big flight from southern California. Either way, it's good to have them back and we hope they stick around for a while.



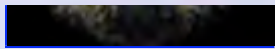
The best condor viewing opportunities can be found in Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park this month. Try the Ewoldsen loop trail and stop at the open areas of the trail where you get a good view up and down the coast. If you're not up for the hike, stop at any of the "Vista Point" roadside pull-outs along coast highway one and scan the ridgelines to the east. Good luck and don't forget your binoculars! Until next month...

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, April 2002:



The youngest cohort of Big Sur condors, the white tags (W19, W22, W31 & W33), celebrated their first year in the wild on April 5, 2002. These four condors have grown by leaps and bounds in their first year. We have observed a faster learning curve



amongst the white tags and documented longer flights compared to previous cohorts.



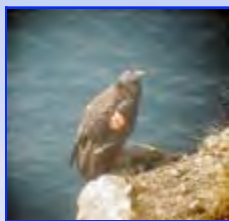
Speaking of long flights, the rest of the flock has been doing an excellent job covering the 200-mile stretch between Big Sur and the Sespe Condor area in southern California. We made



a visit to southern California to assist with the monitoring of condors from the Big Sur flock and were treated to the sight of the first wild-hatched condor chick. The nest site with the chick is located in a hollowed out cave on a cliff face deep in a steep, rugged canyon.

In addition, two other nesting pairs are currently incubating single eggs in similar caves only a couple miles away. Words can't explain what I felt to finally see condors raising their own young in the wild; the last nesting pair to raise a chick in the wild was in 1984. We feel the nesting activity in the Sespe may be the primary attractant right now for older condors from the Big Sur flock, who could possibly nest as early as next year. Nonetheless, the exposure to nesting condors can only benefit our potential breeders. We can only hope they choose a nest site close to home.

We successfully recaptured nine condors from the wild flock in early April. A number of these condors needed radio tag replacements and all nine were tested for blood/lead levels. Much to our relief, all nine condors tested low for blood-lead and were set free back into the wild. The replacement radio tags will last approximately two years, aiding our field crew in monitoring the Big Sur condor flock as well as locating a sick or injured condor if the need arises. Satellite tags were attached to condors B70 and B71. Both of these condors are showing great breeding potential and the satellite tags will help us pinpoint their future nest sites and overall movements throughout California.



Every month the field crew learns valuable lessons about condors and the Big Sur landscape. This month's experience with condor Or9 is a good example of some of those "hard-earned" lessons. Condor Or9, a three-year old male, had been missing for three days before Bridget Cummings found him near Limekiln State Park, south of the release site. Bridget found his

radio signal, but was unable to attain a visual on the bird. The next four days were spent trying to get a visual of Or9; meanwhile his signal did not move that entire time. Becoming increasingly concerned about Or9's welfare and condition, we decided to hike down into the uncharted canyon where his signal emitted the strongest. The search group consisted of myself, Jessica Steffen, Bridget Cummings, Erin Macdonald, Jonathan Carpenter, and Marylise Lefevre. Little did we know what extremes this canyon was about to present to us. The steepness was the immediate eye-opener as were the occasional falling rocks, but that was just the beginning. As we descended into the canyon, we all felt like we were in a location that humans hadn't trod

upon in a very long time, if ever. The true wildness and ruggedness of Big Sur became very apparent as we closed in on Or9's signal. The only obstacle between us and a visual of Or9 was the canyon itself. When the upper slopes of the canyon became impassable, we chose to drop down to the creek, hoping for easier movement. This initially proved to be beneficial and we made some key ground as Or9's signal was getting even stronger, but then the creek walls climbed steeper and steeper and we soon found ourselves at a dead-end made up of a continuous series of twenty foot plus waterfalls. We had no choice but return back to the upper slopes above the creek where walls of poison oak stood in our path. Reluctantly we pushed ahead and made what paths we could through the extremely vegetated and steep terrain. The word "claustrophobia" came up quite often in conversation as we found ourselves "needles in the haystack" of this dense poison oak. Or9, wherever he was, was in a place only condors go. We made it out of the canyon just after nightfall bumped, bruised, and covered with poison oak. We also came out with an immense respect for the canyon in which Or9 was temporarily residing. Although a humbling experience, it's a relief to know such wild, rugged places still exist for the condor.

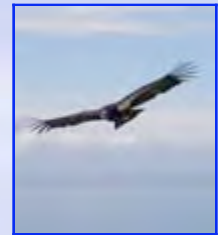
Or9 left Limekiln Canyon the day following our excursion and returned to the release site. We later received a report from an Army biologist at Fort Hunter Liggett that Or9 had been observed feeding on a yearling elk just days before going to Limekiln Canyon. The young elk had been killed by a mountain lion. We were never able to get a visual of Or9 in Limekiln Canyon, but we think he may have been in a good roost tree digesting his full crop of elk meat. Nonetheless, we learned a valuable lesson about the Big Sur landscape and how it can still harbor and protect the condor in its wildness.

The best condor viewing can be found in Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park on the Ewoldsen loop trail. The hike up to Cone peak via the Cone Peak Trail could also yield a condor sighting. Good luck, until next time...

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, March 2002:

March brought more precipitation to the Big Sur region and even managed to blanket the condor release site with a few inches of snow. The shift to warmer weather is becoming more apparent though, and in the coming months we will observe a noticeable increase in condor movements in association with that weather change. The March rains did keep the Big Sur condor flock close to home for most of the month, with the exception of condors W22, Or9, and Or99, who made their first flight to southern California (a 200-mile flight!). These three "first-timers" followed the well-seasoned blue and yellow tags on their journey. This was an unprecedented flight for condor W22. At two years in age, she is the youngest condor we have ever observed successfully navigating the round-trip journey to southern California. We also observed a brief, single day visit to Big Sur by B61 and Y92 at the end of March. Both of these



females have spent a majority of their time in the wilds of southern California over the last year. This was first time these two condors returned to Big Sur together since they left a year ago. Previous visits to Big Sur over the past year have been solo.

Last month we were excited to report that a group of the Big Sur condors fed on a wild sea lion carcass along the Big Sur coastline. This month we observed the same group of condors periodically visit the same area looking for more carcasses, but they didn't have any luck. We hope to see the condors establish a life-long habit of checking this sea lion rookery, which will provide them a consistent food source for years to come.



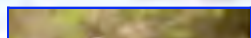
The young red tags continue their development in the flight pen under the watchful eye of adult mentor condor, Hoinewut. Hoinewut performed a courtship display inside the flight pen to two young red tags, R56 and R42. The two red tags, much too young to understand, didn't register his display and moved away. No courtship displays were observed in the wild flock this month, although they could have easily been performed out of our view. The southern California condor flock currently has two nesting pairs and a potential third. Each nesting pair is incubating a single egg, although we do not know if those eggs are fertile. Neither of these pairs has ever successfully reared a chick in the wild and, as with most birds, it usually takes a few attempts to be successful.

With the weather warming we will start to see less condor activity at the Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park redwood grove and more activity around Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park. The warm, mild weather allows the condor flock to disperse and roost over a wider area. The best condor viewing for April will still be found in the redwood treetops at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, particularly after it rains or during wet weather in the late evening or early morning. Good luck and until next month ...

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, February 2002:

Spring was in the air this month as we observed the first breeding attempt ever by the Big Sur flock. Ventana Wildlife Society biologist, Jessica Steffen, watched male condor B64 perform a brief courtship display, wings half open and head down, to condor B71. After the courtship display, B64 approached B71, hopping onto her back, attempting to copulate. B71 accepted his advances, although both condors at five years in age are still too young and inexperienced to successfully breed. Condors typically reach breeding age between 6-8 years of age. At that time they will establish a breeding territory and select a nest site. Based on what we have seen so far, B64 and B71 could be well on their way to a life-long pair bond in the wild.



The excitement kept rolling in this month as the Big



Sur flock discovered a dead sea lion on the coast, just five miles north of the release site. This was the fourth dead marine mammal the condors have fed upon along the Big Sur coast and the second time at this particular rocky beach. B64 and B71 fed on a dead sea lion at this same rocky beach site in March of 1999, the first wild feeding ever by the Big Sur flock.

This coastal site is unique for its abundance in wildlife and its amazing view. As we watched the condors feed on the sea lion carcass on the rocky shore below, we observed peregrine falcons flying overhead, off in the distance we could see a pod of gray whales as they blew spouts of air from the ocean's surface, and a hundred yards down the beach we eyed a rookery of sea lions "barking" as they gathered on rocks and swam through the breakers. We also took notice of the turkey vultures patiently wait for a chance to scavenge on the dead sea lion that was being rapidly consumed by nine condors with voracious appetites. We observed a total of nine condors (B70, B71, Y94, Or4, Or8, Or9, Or 12, W19, & W31), representing four different age groups, finish off the sea lion carcass on the second day. Some condors arrived a little late and missed an opportunity to feed, but none-the-less knew there had been food here at some point.



As the condors closed out feeding on the sea lion carcass, Ventana Wildlife Society biologists Marylise Lefevre and Bridget Cummings observed more exciting behavior from yet another pair of condors. Male condor B70 performed a brief courtship display to Y94 on the rocks near the sea lion carcass. Y94 wasn't very accepting of this

behavior and moved away from B70. Y94 is still fairly young at four years in age and may not have understood what exactly B70's display meant. Despite Y94's lack of interest, this could be an early sign of a pair bond formation in the works.

Some local residents took photos of B64 copulating with a three-year old female condor, Or8. This is very interesting behavior by B64, who was observed early in the month copulating with B71. This also very interesting behavior from Or8, who is well below breeding age yet accepted the breeding advances of B64. Apart from being a potential pair bond with B64, Or8 could possibly be mimicking the behavior of older female B71. Or8 may have also seen this as an opportunity to gain rank within the hierarchy by allowing B64, the most dominant wild condor, to copulate with her.



The excitement didn't end there. Ventana Wildlife Society volunteers Erin McDonald and Jonathan Carpenter reported the return of B61 to the release site from her hiatus in southern California. Interestingly enough, she returned in the company of Y90, who had gone to southern California in early February. B61's return was brief though; she wasn't well received by

the other condors. Her five-month absence from Big Sur may have contributed to this. Either way, B61 didn't waste any time and left Big Sur after only a three-day visit, returning to southern California.

The best condor viewing can be found at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. Scan the redwood treetops near the park entrance for perched condors and nearby Mt. Manuel for condors in flight. Good Luck and until next month ...

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

Notes from the Field, January 2002:



Three newcomers arrived to the release site this month. Condor chicks R36, R51, and R54 were transported from Los Angeles Zoo and San Diego Wild Animal Park to Ventana Wildlife



Society's Big Sur release site on January 24, 2002. These three chicks are 8-9 months in age and have joined R42, R56, R60, and mentor condor R63 in the release pen.

Their arrival couldn't have been more timely; snow blanketed the release pen with a few inches of snow just three days after their transfer. These six chicks, with exception of mentor condor R63, will be released at a new release site within Pinnacles National Monument this upcoming fall.




Pinnacles National Monument is approximately 20 miles due east of the Big Sur and was a nesting site for a pair of condors back in the late 1890's/early 1900's. We hope the range expansion into a known historical nesting area will aid the condors as they approach breeding age and begin "house hunting" for new

nest sites.

The wild Big Sur condors rang in the new year from the protective confines of the coast range. January began very wet and then fell into a warm, dry spell that lasted until almost the end of the month. The wild condors took advantage of the favorable weather break and made good local flights. Condor Y68 was observed soaring with multiple turkey vultures near Burro mountain at the southern end of Fort Hunter Liggett, approximately 30 miles southeast of the release site. Speaking of turkey vultures, they share the same feeding habit of "obligate scavenging" with condors and condors understand that these smaller birds (roughly half their size) could possibly lead them to food. The turkey





vultures, by their own volition, are helping condors, like Y68, rediscover some of their wild foraging habits through this common association with dead food.

Condors B61 and Y92 still remain in southern California's Sespe Condor Sanctuary. The movements of these two condors remained somewhat localized in and around the Sespe as with the other fourteen condors in that same region. The sixteen wild condors in Big Sur didn't fly south to the Sespe this month. Large-scale movements are not typical this time of year when the days are short and the weather is bad.

The best condor viewing opportunities can be found at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. The condors prefer perching in the tops of redwoods and are fairly visible from just inside the park entrance near the general store. The condors will most likely be observed in these redwoods in the early morning or late afternoon. Good luck and until next month ...

--Joe Burnett, Field Coordinator

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