



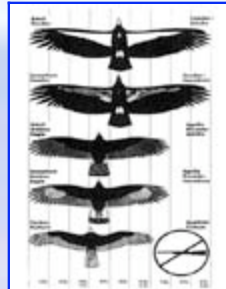
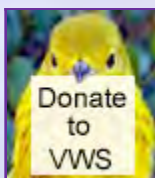
# Ventana Wildlife Society CONDOR REINTRODUCTION NOTES FROM THE FIELD, 2004



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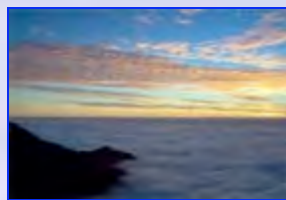
*Comparison Chart*

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, Black - December 19, 2003. 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. The last two digits of the condor identification number appear on the wing tags.



## Notes from the Field, December 2004:

### Big Sur Update



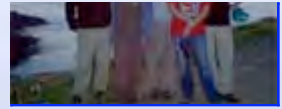
December storms dropped some rain and a few snowflakes on the local condor population, showing the change of the seasons as winter descends on Big Sur. Despite the storms, sunny days were plentiful in the middle of the month. Aside from the normal monitoring of free flying condors, the focus of the Big Sur condor crew for

December was to trap up six of the condors that needed new radio or GPS tags and health checkups: 171, 194, 199, 204, 219, and 318.

During the second week of December, these six condors were selectively caught in our double-door trap adjacent to our wilderness flight pen and were



held there for a few days. On December 20, we captured the birds, gave them physicals, changed transmitters, and tested blood lead levels. Some of the results indicated moderate levels of lead in the blood of a few of the condors. None of the lead poisoning was toxic enough to warrant treatment, but suggested that the condors are still feeding on contaminated food. Curt Mykut and Rebecca Rubin hopped over from the Pinnacles condor release site to help the Big Sur crew with the trap up. Thank you both for joining us for the trap-up and a beautiful Big Sur sunset.



During 318's physical, we found that he had suffered some damage to many of his tail feathers and a small injury to one of his wings, potentially from an encounter with an eagle or another large bird. 318 is one of the condors released this fall and he has undoubtedly discovered that life isn't always easy in the wild. He is currently recuperating at the Pinnacles flight pen and has been socializing with the six older condors held there. 318 will undergo a veterinary evaluation next month to make sure his injuries are healing. We expect he will be released back to the wild before winter's end.

Three GPS transceivers were added to the Big Sur flock during the December 20 trap-up and have immediately generated some interesting data. On December 25, 199 traveled north of Big Sur, well outside of our typical tracking area, and roosted in the Soberanes Canyon area. Another recipient of a GPS tag, 194, may be checking out potential nesting sites and our hopes are high that an egg will be laid this year in the Big Sur area.

On that note, a partial courtship display was observed between two of the older condors on December 22, another suggestion that the condors are gearing up for the breeding season. We also had a report from a local birder of another display and hope that many more will occur in the following months.

The public is encouraged to report condor sightings in Big Sur to our staff at 620-0702, especially along Highway 1. Great locations to view condors this winter (when the weather is decent) include the Valley View and Buzzard's Roost Trails at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park and the Ewoldsen Trail at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park.

*--Braden Burkholder, VWS intern*

## **Pinnacles Update**



The rainy season has begun in Pinnacles National Monument. At the beginning of the month, the second cohort was graced with beautiful weather and wonderful flying conditions. 306 finally left the vicinity of the flight pen and discovered the feeding site as well as the roost pine with the others. 307 took another adventurous journey outside of park boundaries.

She flew north of Pinnacles and roosted away from the park for six days. We were able to acquire visuals of her in flight during that time, but were grateful to receive her GPS data with more accurate information regarding her exact roost locations. Now that the rain has arrived, the birds are very inactive and are not venturing too far from the facility area and Grassy Canyon. We will be moving our feeding site to an additional permanent location with hopes that the birds will make more significant movements and flights.

We did receive a temporary addition to our flight pen this month. 318, a male from the Big Sur population, was transferred to our holding facility due to damage in his left wing. His transmitter and identification tag had apparently been ripped out, resulting in his inability to carry any transmitters for tracking purposes. He will remain in our flight pen with the first cohort until his patagium holes heal up and further plans are decided upon regarding whether or not he can be re-released into the wild. He is interacting well with the older birds and is not hesitant to show aggressiveness when they attempt to flush him from perches and carcasses. The first cohort is slowly but surely welcoming him to the family and we enjoy observing him as he aims to secure his place amongst the group.



-- Rachel Richardson, Pinnacles Field Supervisor

## Notes from the Field, November 2004:

### Big Sur Update

November has been a quiet month for the Big Sur coast, with no major storm systems and plenty of warm days. The pleasant weather has produced ideal flying conditions and the condors have been riding the thermals, cruising along the coast and over the Ventana Wilderness. Almost all of the condors released in Big Sur have made their way back to the region, bringing the resident population to month high of 21 on November 24. Having 14-21 condors in Big Sur has created a lot of activity at feedings and many sightings of condors along Highway 1.



After releasing 6 juvenile condors into the wild in September and October, our flight pen was almost empty for most of November. We finished emptying the pen on November 20 when our mentor condor, Pismo, was transferred to the flight pen at the Hopper Mountain Wildlife Refuge. She will be occupied with a new cohort of this year's hatchlings in mid-December.

Our thanks to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their assistance, and to Pismo, for being the condor version of a kindergarten teacher.

The juveniles released this fall continued to expand their range as the month

progressed. All of the new condors have started roosting away from the flight pen and are frequently seen perched on the redwoods and pines surrounding the release area as the sun sets on the Pacific. Some birds have started exploring well beyond the confines of the release canyon. On November 20, 311 was located in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, over 10 miles from the release site. This is the furthest location we have documented for any of the new condors.

Finally, two new interns started on the Big Sur Condor Crew in November, Sayre Flannagan and Braden Burkholder. Both bring a wealth of field knowledge, enthusiasm, and new techniques to the project. Welcome to the Crew!

*--Braden Burkholder, VWS intern and  
Jessica Koning, Big Sur Field Supervisor*

## Pinnacles Update



The second cohort of condors released at Pinnacles National Monument has been doing phenomenally well adjusting to their intriguing surroundings. 317 was the last to be released on November 28th, and within a few days, she had joined the group in their favorite roost pine. 306 is the only one that has not ventured too far from the flight pen just yet. She has been making short flights around the pen area, but has not discovered the new feeding site with the others. We have placed food in the double-door trap to ensure that she is being fed until she is brave enough to leave her comfortable perch in search of new territory.

When juvenile condors are first released into the wild, it may take some time before they explore far beyond their familiar home. Congregating and roosting near the flight pen for a few weeks is not unusual behavior for newly released birds. There is, however, generally one bird that swiftly advances in flight skills and takes on the leadership role in the dominance hierarchy. 307, the first bird in the second cohort to be released, has become the most advanced and adventurous one thus far. Shortly after her release, she had already flown outside of park boundaries and discovered new roosting areas on her own. She interacts well with the other birds, and they seem curious when she returns from her nights spent away from Grassy Canyon. At present, the only condor that has exhibited analogous behavior is 310. She also has exceptional flight skills, and has already been documented making flights over an hour. 307 and 310 can often be seen soaring together over Mount Defiance and the southern boundary of the park.



With regards to plans for the first cohort, we had to finally recapture 286 shortly before we released 317. He served as an outstanding role model for the juveniles, and absolutely helped them establish good habits. He led the birds to the feeding site, showed them a few of his preferred roosting areas, and coaxed them into flight when they were still unsure of the distance they could go. 286 has joined the rest of his cohort in the flight pen, and we are

still in the process of determining the best alternative for the birds and their power pole perching behavior. This is a difficult decision to make, but we will do what is right in order to make certain that these behaviors will not be passed along to subsequent cohorts or the future population of California condors.

-- Rachel Richardson, Pinnacles Field Supervisor

## Notes from the Field, October 2004:

### Big Sur Update

What a wet October we experienced here in Big Sur, not exactly the driest first month in the wild for our newly released condors. Yet, despite the rainy weather, the six newly released chicks have shown considerable ability in their flying, feeding, and fending for themselves in their new domain.

As reported last month, the first condors to leave the flight pen were 298, 311, and 318 on September 25th. Unfortunately days later, 298 had been spotted roosting on the ground, which is not a very safe place for any condor to roost due to predators, although this can be expected sometimes with new birds that are only used to captive environments. Subsequently, 298 was trapped back up on September 28th in hopes that we would be able to release her when there were more wild birds in the area to show her some better places to roost.



October 7th marked the day of our second release. This time, 294 and 301 took their first breath of freedom and tested the crisp Big Sur breezes. They both tested out their wings and spent time with the other two chicks. A while after the second release, 294 decided to venture off into a nearby canyon where we could not get a visual on her. Over a week went by and we got increasingly worried that she was not coming to the feeding area and we made several attempts to locate her. Soon after this, she showed up at the feeding site one afternoon and fed with all the other wild birds. Last but not least, condors 303 and 298 were released on October 14th to join their wild cohort, and since then, all six of the new birds have adjusted quite well to their new surroundings.

The older condors have been a welcomed presence, as it is their lead the young birds follow and from whom they learn how to survive in the wild. We have had 18 birds here throughout the month as we come into the fall/winter breeding season. We are quite proud to see that all of the new condors have been roosting in trees, able to find water, and have all learned to get in there and feed with the older birds.

It is rather important that we keep a close eye on these new condors for they are just stepping out upon the fringes of a vast new world filled with

exciting, and sometimes dangerous, twists and turns. Yet, from the looks of things so far, this new cohort of condors will comfortably adjust themselves to life above the Big Sur coastline.

--Clint Scheuerman, VWS Intern

## Pinnacles Update



The crew at Pinnacles National Monument had a successful release on October 28th, 2004. 307 stepped into the double-door trap, and was the first female condor to be released into the park! She quickly jumped onto the nearby ledge, and took a



flawless forty-second flight around the flight pen. 286, one of the two-year old birds, was perched close by when 307 was released. He became exceedingly curious and even showed a bit of dominance by attempting to flush her when she hopped up next to him on one of the snags. 307 made a second flight later in the afternoon before settling in for roost on a nearby oak snag. We were able to release 310 and 313 the next morning, both making their own victorious flights around the flight pen area. The newly released birds have all been feeding together and have rapidly established good roosting habits. We hope to release the rest of the second cohort in the month of November.

As I mentioned last month, we had to trap up 266 for perching on power poles. We ended up observing 270 and 278 also exhibiting this behavior shortly after 266's return to the flight pen. Although we documented only three of the five free-flying birds on power poles, we had to assume that all of them had at some point seen another bird landing on them. We decided that it was necessary to trap the entire first cohort and begin an aversive training session that will hopefully rid these birds of this heartbreaking behavior. Modifications were made to the power pole inside the pen, as well as to the outside support posts of the facility. If a bird lands on one of these poles, they will feel a slight and discomforting shock as a result. Before 278 was brought back in, he was seen making an attempted landing on the outside post that is now electrified. He is presently in the flight pen with the others, and there have been no observations made of any birds landing on the mock power pole inside the pen.

I would like to add that 286 is currently the only bird from the first cohort that, for the time being, will remain in the wild. He has always been a bird that chooses to stick close to home. He rarely ever leaves the park boundaries, and is the first one to show up at the flight pen every morning. We have been amazed at the mentor role that he has taken on with the younger ones, and we feel that he is a valuable element in their progress. Sadly, we will have to bring 286 back in once 306, 312, and 317 are released. As soon as we can conclude that the aversive conditioning has been effective, we will release the birds once again. They will then be able to continue interacting with one another, and we can go on pursuing the goal of establishing a self-sustaining population of California condors in

Pinnacles National Monument.

-- Rachel Richardson, Pinnacles Field Supervisor

## Notes from the Field, September 2004:

### Big Sur Update

September marked Ventana Wildlife Society's sixth release in Big Sur, CA. We released condors 298, 311 and 318 on September 25, 2004. Thanks to all members and friends who helped make this event so special! The three released condors chose to stick close to the flight pen where they have lived these past months. Luckily, some of the older condors flew through the area on this warm and breezy day. As September came to a close, 298, 311 and 318 were taking short flights around the release area and finding food and water. The remaining condors in the flight pen will be released in early October.



The condor project would like to welcome new intern Clint Scheuerman to the crew! Clint graduated from California Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo County, and has since done substantial field projects in central and southern California. He has already been a tremendous addition to our team! He arrived only a few weeks before the condor release, and provided limitless amounts of energy, helping Ventana's biologists and condors prepare for this plunge into the wild.

Until next time....

--Jessica Koning, Big Sur Field Supervisor

### Pinnacles Update

The condors at Pinnacles are always changing as they continue to grow and head towards maturity. We track them daily to observe their unique behaviors, and sometimes catch them making choices that are not usually the wisest. This month, we had to re-trap 266 for repeatedly endangering himself as he chose to land on utility poles in the nearby towns of Paicines and Tres Pinos. 266 was picking poles that had large wooden beams that towered over the electrical parts of the units. Naturally, he liked these perches because they were the tallest ones around and they gave him a great view of the surrounding valley. The groups of turkey vultures that would congregate in the nearby pines, as well as on the poles, quite possibly could have contributed to 266's return to these dire perches. Unfortunately, one

false move or slip could have ended in disaster for 266.

As a team, we decided that the best solution in the interim was to catch 266 in the double door trap and bring him back into the flight pen for a while. In most similar situations, we use toy squirt guns or noisemakers to haze a bird from a bad perch. Obviously, these were not the greatest methods being that 266 was extremely close to electrical coils and lines. By giving him a "time-out" in the pen, we had hoped to break him of this ill-fated habit. However, even though birds may be trapped and released on a consistent basis for bad behavior, that does not ensure that they are learning the full lesson nor that they understand what they are being trapped for. We are currently discussing modifying the pseudo power pole inside the flight pen in order to make it even more realistic and similar to the poles that 266 was landing on. We will also make changes to the outside support posts of the flight pen that have always been one of their preferred perches. The idea is to avert the birds from wanting to land on power poles or man-made structures that resemble power poles.

On a lighter note, the younger condors in the flight pen are getting closer to their October 28th release into the wild. We have been watching them very closely to make sure that they are prepared as much as they can be for the outside world. One of the females, 307, had broken off the very tip of her beak several weeks ago. We were not sure how it happened, but monitored her daily for any signs of illness or extreme discomfort. For the first couple of days, she kept her beak tucked gently against her body, and kept to herself as she rested. On the fourth day after her accident, she was observed feeding and drinking which was a good sign meaning she was probably going to be just fine. Currently, she is back to normal interacting with the others and aggressively feeding on the carcasses. The tip of her beak seems to be smoothing out on its own and does not interfere with her ability to feed and preen.

Lastly, 287 had to be trapped back into the pen due to the malfunctioning of his GPS transmitter. Water and dirt had gotten inside the solar panel and were delaying the transmission of information. We are going to replace the GPS tag and 287 will be released as soon as possible. Thanks for keeping up with the Pinnacles release site and I look forward to bringing you next month's news!

-- Rachel Richardson, Pinnacles Field Supervisor

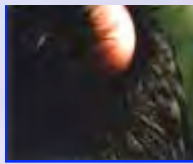
### Notes from the Field, August 2004:

#### Big Sur Update



August was a little cooler than average here in Big Sur. Locals are starting to suspect an El Niño event for this winter. We are





hoping that the weather remains calm for a while at least so the release goes well and the chicks can have time to adjust to their new environment. I am not sure who is more anxious for the release of the chicks in the flight pen, the condor biologists or the chicks. We have been spending many long days watching the birds to make sure their health remains good and they are demonstrating appropriate behaviors. According to our rearing specialist they are more than ready and can't wait to be out and flying free. The release is scheduled for Saturday, September 25th, but will be a very small event due to its remote location.



There were fewer wild birds in the area this month than last. They also seem to be staying away from trouble and the highway. We had 10 different condors here throughout the month as they traveled back and forth from here and the USFWS site in southern California. For the oldest birds or blue tags we had 164, 167 and 171, who were held in our flight pen briefly and released again. We had only 194 here from the yellow tag bunch and 199 and 209 from our orange tags. We remain to have our red tag or youngest group here still, for they don't seem to venture too far yet but are getting to know the area well.

We do have some unfortunate news to report on the wild nests down at Hopper Mountain. Blue tag 192, a Ventana released bird and her mate AC-9, a Hopper bird that actually was the last bird taken from the wild in 1987, are the parents of one of the chicks. We got a report from USFWS that the chick fell out of its nest and broke its wing. Condors nest in caves or holes in rocky slopes. Often the nests are on a vertical cliff, and eggs as well as the chicks have been known to fall out occasionally. The chick was taken in to the vet for examination and x-rays revealed that the chick had a broken wing, and bottle caps and rocks in its intestines that were fed to it by its parents. This is unfortunate since the parents do not mean to do their baby any harm but seem to be attracted to debris of this sort for unknown reasons. The injured chick will remain in captivity for now and hopefully will be able to be released with the next cohort to go out. The other chick belonging to a Ventana released bird, 161, is still hanging in there and we hope that it will fledge in early October although there is concern for its health as well.

On a more exciting note, our orange tag bird 199 was spotted on August 15th at Pinnacles National Monument, Ventana Wildlife Society's other release site northwest of here. He is one of our older birds and fairly dominant. We have long wondered how long it would take our birds to find their fellow condor neighbors. 199 hung out around the site getting acquainted with the other birds there and flew back here on the 23rd. (See [below](#) for more details.) Time will tell if the other birds will follow in his lead.

We hope to get through next month without any major problems and that everything goes as planned for the release. Once the chicks go out, our work has only just begun though, for we have to keep very close tabs on the birds all the time. Using radio tracking methods it will be key to try to locate every bird daily and make sure they appear to be in good health and are displaying appropriate behaviors in the wild. I know we are all getting

excited and looking forward to seeing the new chicks flying free at last!

*--Melanie Hibbard, VWS Intern*

## **Pinnacles Update**

August was an exciting and eventful month at Pinnacles National Monument. With a surprise visit from a Big Sur condor, and the re-release of #270 and #278, we definitely did not experience a dull moment! The heat did indeed skyrocket, and there were several days where the temperature exceeded 100 degrees. I believe that the month of September will be similar, but the park should hopefully begin to see a significant decline in high temperatures.

The highlight of the month was the arrival of an unexpected houseguest from Big Sur. On August 15th, an adult condor was observed hanging around the flight pen with a few of the juveniles. Once it was confirmed that Hoi, our mentor bird, had not successfully attempted a magical escape, we narrowed down the possibilities. #199, a five-year old male, had made his way to Pinnacles all the way from Big Sur! He quickly found the flight pen and made a connection with the younger birds. He was warmly welcomed by #266, #286, and #287, and all four were seen soaring high above the peaks and roosting together every night during his stay. The birds inside the flight pen were intrigued by #199 and although limited by the fence, their interactions were plentiful. Hoi seemed especially interested, and both birds were often seen mutually rubbing beaks through the fence. While #199 was in the park, we tried utilizing one of the new feeding sites in hopes that he would lead the birds to a carcass. Unfortunately, they never went to the site so we were unable to observe a group feeding with him. #199 did feed during his stay, and had no problem boldly displaying his dominance over #286 by flushing him from the carcass several times. Overall, there were not many aggressive interactions noted between the juveniles and #199. #266, #286, and #287 showed a genuine curiosity and interest in having an older bird around to emulate. After ten days of vacation, #199 finally headed back home to Big Sur. He has not shown up since, but this is one houseguest that will be welcomed back at Pinnacles any time!

We finally re-released #270 and #278 back into the park and ultimately they made a smooth transition into the wild. #270 had no problem finding his place again amongst the free-flying birds. He was always a bit of a pushy bird and never had trouble socializing and feeding in a group setting. He has been roosting primarily in the high peaks with the others and sticking close to home for the time being. #278 has slowly been adjusting to being back outside of the flight pen. While he was being held in captivity, we documented signs of improvement with his social skills and ability to interact with other condors. During feedings, he seldom showed signs of apprehension and was often dominating the carcasses with #265 and #270 over the younger cohort. Since his re-release, we have not observed him communally feeding with the group. His flight skills are excellent and he has been seen kindly interacting with a few of the others. Nevertheless, he still seems timid and uncertain when it comes to feeding with the other birds

around. We are keeping a close eye on #278, and hope that he is just one of those birds that may need a little more time.

Last but not least, I'd like to mention that our newest interns Jen Mannas and Rebecca Rubin have been doing a wonderful job and we are very lucky to have them as part of the Pinnacles team. Thank you for keeping up with the Pinnacle release site, and stay tuned for next month's exciting details.

-- Rachel Richardson, Pinnacles Field Supervisor

## Notes from the Field, July 2004:

### Big Sur Update


The month of July has been a hot one here in the foothills of Big Sur. It is often foggy down by the coast and we now welcome tracking in the clouds on these hot days. Despite the high temperatures, we are pleased to announce that the new chicks in the flight pen are doing well and are eagerly awaiting their release. The wild condors have been hanging around the pen most of the month and getting acquainted with the captive birds. We like this to happen because when the young ones are out in the wild these visitors will be important role models.

A few weeks back, one of the chicks, 294, had somehow injured her eye while in the flight pen. Millie Brower, our rearing specialist, noticed she was keeping one of her eyes closed most of the time. When it did not get better, we had to take her into the vet for an exam. After treatment, she gradually got better as the days went on and now she is using both eyes normally and seems to be recovered 100%. We are very grateful she recovered because an injury that impairs vision can be deadly for condors. The chicks are all ready to go and have designated white tags with numbers already. It looks like the release may happen earlier than expected, sometime in the end of September. It will be a very exciting time but also worrisome for us as they go out on their own for the first time.

Along with having our hands full with the chicks, we also had lots of wild condors in the area this month. We had 164, 167, and 171 from the blue tag or oldest cohort. We also had 190 and 194 from the yellow tags, and 204, 208, and 209 from the orange tags. The rest of the birds we had included 219 and 231 of the white tags and 236, 242 and 251 of the red tags. The red tags were most recently released and they have not ventured too far out of the area yet.



The condors continue to move and perch along the Highway 1 corridor. Certain birds in particular have been utilizing coastal habitat and allowing close approach of people. Blue tag condor 171 was especially a problem getting too close to people on the highway. We made the decision to temporarily hold



her in the flight pen with the chicks. Temporary holdings like these have been helpful in the past because they can break a pattern of concerning behavior.

The main area of concern along Highway 1 is adjacent to a marine mammal colony where the condors have fed. The highway is simply a convenient place for a condor to survey the colony for food. It is also cooler down by the ocean and the coastal cliffs are perfect for the air currents helpful for easy take-offs. The problems arise when the condors get too close to the heavy traffic on Highway 1 and people see the birds and stop only to get too close. We had an incident in the beginning of the month where we were out tracking the birds along the highway and saw 208 flying low across the road and coming very close to being hit by an oncoming car. Millie and I pulled over to find a dead deer off the side of the road. 204 and 208 had found the deer and were probably feeding on it. Even though we supply food for the birds on a regular basis, they are by nature very curious birds and we have to keep a close eye on them when they are in areas of human development.

With how busy we have been, it is a good thing that we hired a new intern to help out on the condor crew! Mike Tyner has had experience working with condors at Hi Mountain and has been a very valuable contribution to the team already. He will be with us for only a short time since he will return to school in September for graduate work. We look forward to next month and are optimistic about the future for the new birds. We plan on enjoying the rest of the summer in the presence of the condors!

*--Melanie Hibbard, VWS Intern*

## **Pinnacles Update**

July at Pinnacles was a relatively uneventful month considering the flurry of activity that occurred in June. A great deal of effort goes into rounding up condors for lead testing, not to mention the anxiety we all experienced waiting for results. So, I can speak for the whole field crew when I say that the lack of excitement this past month was welcomed and has given all of us a chance to re-energize and prepare for the upcoming fall release. Speaking of field crew, Ventana added two new interns to the field efforts at Pinnacles over the last month, Jennifer Mannas and Rebecca Rubin. Jen arrived from Florida where she recently completed her B.S. in wildlife ecology from the University of Florida and Rebecca from British Columbia where she has been working as a wildlife rehabilitator. They are welcomed additions to the Pinnacles crew and will be with us through January.

While the free flying birds spent a large percentage of their time at the flight facility and the high peaks we did document a new condor use area in July. The first discovery was made via the use of 287's GPS tag. We knew that the birds had disappeared from the immediate park area, but did not realize the extent of the movement until receiving a map from our GIS specialist Eric Stover. 287 made his way approximately 40 miles south of the park to the Charley Mountain area south of highway 198. Upon initiating a conventional VHF telemetry search using 287's GPS coordinates we

discovered that the other birds were using the same area. This is yet another example of the utility of GPS tracking technology. By relying solely on conventional telemetry we would probably never have discovered this area, because by the time we organized a search and identified search zone transects the birds would have likely made their way back to the release site. Our GPS tags on the other hand are programmed to collect data points once per hour, sixteen hours per day on a daily basis. Ventana currently has seven GPS tags deployed, with six of them attached to birds at our Big Sur site. By this fall we will have five more tags to deploy and plan to distribute a couple more to the Pinnacles site. With the increased usage of GPS tracking technology we will not only have a more effective means of locating our birds on a daily basis, but we will now have the ability to more effectively identify condor flyways, and roost and foraging sites. This, in turn, allows us to more easily identify threats or new use areas that may need to be protected and will ultimately allow us to implement the most effective conservation management strategies for condors.

I would like to thank Cathy Keeran, our administrative assistant, and executive director Kelly Sorenson for putting together a new page on the web site regarding [lead ammunition](#), so be sure to check it out.

Until next month...Cheers!

-- Curt Mykut, Condor Program Coordinator


### Notes from the Field, June 2004:

#### Big Sur Update

The biggest news for the month of June is that we will be releasing birds in Big Sur again in the fall! The USFWS brought us 6 chicks and a mentor bird on the 29th. They had a long drive from southern California but are now in the flight pen and doing well. Millie Brower, VWS intern, has accepted the position of our rearing specialist over the next several months. She will be monitoring the birds closely and making sure they are ready for release.

The month of June was a little crazier than last month for the condor crew. There was also lots of training to finish with the three newest interns and it was the start of the busy summer time. Jessica Koning has certainly had her hands full with training us all at the same time and we are very grateful for all that she has taught us in such a short time! Joy Retzlaff, VWS intern, has also accepted the position of crew leader and will be taking on more responsibilities as well.

Last month there were very few condors around, 3 or 4 at the most at one time. This month our numbers nearly doubled and we had 7 or 8 condors here through most of the month. A number of our previously released birds that were residing at Hopper Mountain in southern California came back to join us for a while. It was nice to have them back!



It seemed though that the more birds we had here the harder it was to keep them out of trouble. They all started concentrating in one area along Highway 1, probably due to a nearby feeding site at the time as well as a favorite perching spot. We started having problems with the birds getting too close to the highway, near cars and people. Because of the captive breeding process, the birds are not as "wild" as they should be and they do not seem to have the natural instinct of fearing humans yet. This is why it is important that people do not approach the birds and keep their distance. However, we had several incidents of people getting too close to the birds when they were up near the highway. Please remember they are endangered and to protect them we need to minimize human contact when at all possible. Along with keeping your distance, there are also laws against approaching, feeding or harassing endangered wildlife. If you see a condor in a situation that is unsafe, please call and notify us. We greatly appreciate getting calls from concerned people!

During mid-June we were asked by the USFWS to go down to Southern California for a trap up of the birds. Many of the birds we have released here like to go down to that area and they currently had many of the Ventana birds down there, so we were glad to help out. The entire Big Sur crew and two condor people from the Pinnacles site joined us. The trap up went very well and they had many in the trap already by early morning. It was a great chance for the newer interns to get some close encounters and real hands-on activity. Mike Stockton from the USFWS, who has a long history of working with condors, gave us tips on how to handle the birds and keep safe. They had biologists and vets from the L.A. and San Diego zoos to check health of the birds, give shots and take blood. All the birds were also tested for lead poisoning. The levels were all relatively low. We also changed radio and GPS transmitters and put on new tags because they only last just so long. The birds did very well despite the hot temperatures and we kept them cooled down with ice water. It was really wonderful to see so many condors flying free in one area!

We had an unfortunate incident happen recently that involved potential lead poisoning with the wild birds. There was an injured horse that had to be put down in the area and after a couple of days the condors found it and were flying above, circling it. The animal had been shot with lead bullets, which could have cost us the lives of the entire population of condors had they fed on the dead animal. Luckily, we were called in time and were able to get rid of the lead before they got to it. This incident can be a reminder to all of us that using bullets made with lead is deadly to any animal that could come across it and ingest it. Along with a variety of online resources, there are many stores that carry non-lead alternatives. However, the majority of ammunition still used is made with lead. It takes only a small fragment of lead to kill a condor and they die a slow and painful death. This situation could have been a lot worse than it was and I hope that it will bring about more awareness of the issue of lead poisoning. Education and awareness are the keys to protecting our wildlife!

*--Melanie Hibbard, VWS Intern*

## Pinnacles Update



June temperatures at Pinnacles surprised me. We had a shift in late May to hot temperatures, but for the better part of June we remained below 90. I'm told that it won't last though, so heed my warning from May and be prepared for dry, hot conditions if you plan to visit Pinnacles and the condors.

The first three quarters of June were relatively uneventful. The captive birds continued to progress and should be fully prepared for a fall release. We have chosen October 15 as the release date and will provide further details regarding the release by early September. 265 and 278 remained in the release facility for yet another month, but decisions have been made regarding their immediate future. 265 will continue to be held at our Pinnacles release facility and re-released at the end of October. I know for two months now I have stated that 278 would be re-released and it hasn't occurred. And while the retrices (tail feathers) that were causing concern have molted and he has made significant progress with regards to his reluctance to feed in a group setting we plan to hold him and re-release him just prior to the release of the second cohort. At this stage we feel that by continuing to expose him to the young cohort he may serve as a free-flying mentor to the youngsters when they are released.

Prior to the last week in June all was well with our four free-flying birds and aside from an increased frequency in the number of significant flights outside of park boundaries we did not observe any aberrant behavior. By June 26th, however, things changed drastically and the crew had to respond to our first lead poisoning scare. On Saturday June 26th, one of our crew members made the first observation of Pinnacles condors feeding on a non-proffered carcass. Our initial reaction was not one of concern since the birds were feeding on what appeared to be a dead calf on one of the local ranches. Upon further investigation, however, we learned that not only had the calf allegedly been poached, but five wild pigs that were scattered throughout property may have been poached and possibly fed upon by the birds. Upon learning this from a local landowner we made the decision to trap the four free-flying birds and test them for lead exposure. Before we had a chance to begin the trapping process we observed 287, 270 and 266 feeding on a large cow carcass to the east of the park on private land. The cow may have been euthanized with a firearm (personal communication with a local landowner), so our concerns were heightened. By July 2nd we captured all four birds via the double-door trap at the flight facility and had field test results for lead completed by noon of that day. I am pleased to report that blood lead levels were low for all four birds and that all of them were subsequently released.



Although it was a relief to learn that the birds had probably not been exposed to lead during these feeding events we understand that a significant threat still exists. Condors being obligate scavengers have a very high propensity for ingesting lead bullet fragments from poached animals or animals that are shot and un-recovered. This is one reason why it is so

important for us to monitor the birds on a daily basis and make as many visual observations as possible. This allows us to better understand the frequency at which the condors are finding food on their own and to what degree the non-proffered food is posing a lead exposure risk. While lead ammunition is currently legal to use for hunting upland game, there are non-lead alternatives available that are not acutely toxic to condors, turkey vultures, and golden and bald eagles when they ingest bullet fragments from carcasses. Addressing the lead issue through education and awareness and working with the hunting community (which I am a part of) will be a critical component to successful recovery of the California condor.

Until next month...Cheers!

-- Curt Mykut, Condor Program Coordinator

### Notes from the Field, May 2004:

#### Big Sur Update



At the beginning of May, we finally had some success capturing condors in our flight pen to replace their tags and to do physical checks monitoring their health. We have been attempting to trap since February (!), but so many of the wild flock have been trapped before and are wise to our techniques. The trap-up was a success, with condors 251, 242, 236, 222, 208 and 167 released with new tags. Some of these condors now have state-of-the-art GPS tags. These tags give frequent and accurate locations of the condors, and are revolutionizing our abilities to monitor our flock in the more remote parts of central and southern California. There are certainly areas of the Big Sur backcountry that are difficult for people to access without a three day hike.

Condors are very smart. Studying them is a constant reminder that very few can accurately claim to have condors "all figured out". They have large brains for birds, and spend the first 2 years of their lives learning appropriate behaviors from other birds (preferably their parents). Most bird species have stronger instinctual guidelines for their behavior. The end result of this is that individual birds can be very different, and it is very difficult to predict what the condors will do next. It is one of the joys of condor biology that VWS training protocols only teach our interns and staff so much; after a few months on the condor crew, your training comes from the condors and can continue for a lifetime.

--Jessica Koning, Big Sur Field Supervisor

#### Pinnacles Update

I am happy to report that on May 12th VWS and NPS staff successfully transferred one male and three female juvenile condors from the Los Angeles Zoo to the Pinnacles release facility. I would like to thank the entire condor staff at the Los Angeles Zoo for their hospitality and assistance during our visit. It was a real pleasure working with them.

By midnight on the 12th all four birds were placed in isolation pens within the facility and by the next morning began the process of acclimating to their new surroundings and social group. Aside from the typical behaviors associated with the introduction of new members to a group such as displacements at perch and feeding sites, the first day went extremely well and all continues to go well.

With the addition of the four new birds we now have nine condors in the release facility, although this may change within the month of June. 278 appears to be doing extremely well after being recaptured and held for two months now. An additional concern that we had for 278 was that four tail feathers seemed to be missing for an unusually long period of time, so this has delayed his re-release. During early May he was examined to verify that there was not an infection of the feather follicle which could potentially prevent the emergence of a new feather shaft. This was not the case, but rather the feathers were somehow broken very close to the base of the feather shaft. It appears that new feather growth is occurring, so his re-release should not be too far off.

265 presents a different set of circumstances. We were quite disconcerted about his reaction to our staff entering the pen to do health checks on birds in early May. He exhibited no signs of trepidation and made no effort to escape upon entering the pen. This is very consistent with the behavior he exhibited prior to recapture as described in last month's field notes. It appears that at this stage he may be too comfortable in the presence of humans which could potentially have negative consequences for him in a wild setting. Although he continues to be the second most dominant bird amongst the group of nine in the release facility, and has been feeding well, we will continue to hold him in a captive setting for now. The possibility exists that we may transfer him to one of the zoos for a longer term, more isolated holding. This decision has yet to be made.

As for the six youngsters in the pen, they have all been progressing very well. All have begun the process of developing motor skills and make frequent flights inside of the release pen (termed mesh flights) especially in response to wild condors flying in view. Based on observations to date, condor 307 appears to be the low ranking bird in the group of youngsters while 313 has been at the top of the dominance hierarchy. Although all of the youngsters have been pushed around a bit by 265 and 278 they all seem to be holding their own just fine.

Not much new to report on the four free-flying birds. They continue to utilize the high peaks and areas in close proximity to the release facility on a frequent basis and on occasion make forays outside of the park. To date we have not discovered any new perch or roost sites beyond the area shown on the [map](#) in last month's field notes.

On a less than cheerful note, Leva Coe completed her internship with VWS in late May and will be moving on to New Mexico to pursue work related to spotted owl prey dynamics. We will certainly miss her here at Pinnacles, but wish her the best in her next position and future endeavors.

As of May 31st the weather at Pinnacles has made the shift from mild spring temps to the sweltering heat typical of inland summers in California. I expect 95 and higher for the next three and a half months at least, so if you do plan a visit to the park to see the birds be sure to bring plenty of water and protection from the sun.

Until next month!

-- Curt Mykut, Condor Program Coordinator

### Notes from the Field, April 2004:

#### Big Sur Update

April was an exciting month to be a condor biologist. We were thrilled to learn that female condors 161 and 192 both had eggs hatch around Easter Sunday! These two condors were released in Big Sur by VWS, but have spent most of the last 2 years living at the USFWS condor release site near Fillmore, CA. They are first-time mothers, and we have high hopes for both of them and their new chicks.



On April 16, condor biologist Greg Gryniewicz discovered a dead sea lion washed up on a beach south of Big Sur. He watched it for almost a week, and eventually saw condors 164 and 242 feed on the marine mammal. Big Sur is the only area in the U.S. where there is a coastal condor population, and we are always excited to see them finding food here just like their ancestors did hundreds of years ago. Greg also saw over 50 whales (some of them breaching completely out of the sea!) and sea otters while he watched over the beach.

We would like to welcome Joy Retzlaff, Amelia Brower, and Melanie Hibbard to the condor crew, and say goodbye to Melanie Banville and Greg Gryniewicz, who will be continuing their training as field biologists on the sky islands of southern Arizona. Thanks for all the hard work, and good luck!

--Jessica Koning, Big Sur Field Supervisor

#### Pinnacles Update

Peak visitor traffic at the park certainly occurred during the month of April, and understandably so. Blooming wildflowers, mild temperatures for the first three quarters of the month, and of course the presence of California

condors, drew quite a few people to the park.

April was also an eventful month for the condor crew. Most notably condors 278 and 265 were recaptured and brought back into the release facility for temporary holding, and a new feeding site was established for the free-flying birds. So, much of our attention was drawn to observing the interactions amongst the various age classes within the release facility and determining how quickly the free-flying birds would find the new feeding site. The transfer of the four juvenile condors from the L.A. Zoo was postponed and will occur during the week of May 10th, so stay tuned for updates next month.

The recaptures of 278 and 265 occurred on April 2nd and 6th, respectively. Condor 278 had been at the low end of the dominance hierarchy for sometime and was frequently observed being displaced during feeding events, had been seen using less than ideal perch sites on private land, and prior to his recapture had not been observed feeding for about 10 days. When he did finally attempt to feed he was pursued by a coyote and flushed from the feeding slope. To air on the side of caution we made the decision to recapture him, obtain a weight, ensure that he fed, and allow him to interact with the two younger females, possibly elevating his status amongst the older cohort once he is re-released. Since recapture, he has been doing quite well. He has been feeding consistently, has a solid weight of 19 lbs., and has interacted very well with Hoi, the mentor bird, and the two young females. His release date is pending, but should occur by the end of May.



Condor 265 on the other hand was recaptured for the unfavorable behavioral patterns he was developing. More specifically, he was falling into a consistent pattern of being drawn towards human activity at the park. On three occasions he was observed perched at the top of popular rock climbing routes as climbing parties ascended. Instead of flushing he exhibited a sense of curiosity towards the climbers in all three instances. On two other occasions he was observed perching on low lying rocks adjacent to popular hiking trails as large groups of visitors observed him. Again, he appeared more curious than threatened and held his ground as the park visitors took pictures. In both instances he was hazed with a super-soaker water gun, but this did not seem to deter him since two of the interactions with climbers occurred after the hazing incidents. We felt that recapture and short term holding was the next step in an effort to break this behavioral pattern. This has been a successful technique used in the past and will hopefully prove effective for 265. Although 265 has been feeding well and maintaining a solid weight he will in all likelihood be held until the end of May.



Not much new to report with regards to the two young females, 306 and 317. As expected, they are at the bottom of the pecking order with 265 and 278 now in the release facility, but this close social interaction with older birds will hopefully prove to be a positive experience for the youngsters.

The remaining four free-flying birds continue to do well and have established consistent patterns with regards to diurnal and nocturnal habitat selection. Similar to what I reported in March, the birds continue to frequently use the high peaks area of the park as well as the ridge closest to the release facility as both perching and roost areas. 287 was the only bird that disappeared on a routine basis. I have included a [map](#) that was completed earlier in April which gives you an idea of the extent of his range thus far.



Due to the presence of coyotes at our original feeding area, which seemed to be deterring the birds from feeding there, and the close call that 278 had with a coyote at the old site, we established a new feeding area. To ensure the exclusion of terrestrial predators we erected an electric fence around the new site and it took the birds about 4 days to locate the new area. They have been visiting the new site frequently and feeding there on a consistent basis. Our next step is to mount a camera that is activated by motion to 1.) confirm that terrestrial predators are not breaching the fence and 2.) photograph condor feeding events at close range. We have observed a number of other birds at the new area interacting with the condors, including turkey vultures, ravens, golden eagles and red-tailed hawks. However, none of the interactions have been aggressive.

The May update should be an exciting one with the arrival of the 4 new juveniles! So be sure to check back in.

Until next month!

-- Curt Mykut, Condor Program Coordinator

## Notes from the Field, March 2004:

### Big Sur Update

March was warm and dry in Big Sur. These are conditions for excellent flying. Tracking the condors often involved following them in a vehicle as they flew up and down the coast within sight of Highway 1. Keeping up with them would be more or less impossible if they were not stopping frequently to circle in the thermals. These upwellings of warm air occur most often in the heat of midday. A thermal full of condors resembles nothing so much as a lazy tornado.



People often remark on how infrequently condors flap their wings. Powered flight is generally only necessary on takeoff and landing, unless the condor is a novice flyer or the weather is nasty. However, the springtime is the season when condors are most



likely to attempt some pretty daredevil flying maneuvers. Sometimes this is necessary when a condor blunders into a hawk's breeding territory and is chased out. During the breeding season, condors will chase each other at high speed, or line up for a head-on flyby that looks something like "chicken".

With summer fast approaching, condor activity is increasing in Julia Pfeiffer-Burns State Park, about 10 miles south of Big Sur. Try getting up above to tree canopy on the left fork of the Ewoldsen trail for the best viewing!

The condors overwintering in Big Sur are courting and showing pairing behaviors, but there is no sign as yet of reproduction.

*--Jessica Koning, Big Sur Field Supervisor*

## **Pinnacles Update**

Dear Ventana members and loyal visitors to "Notes from the Field":


I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new condor program coordinator for the Ventana Wildlife Society. It really is an honor to be part of the Ventana team, and be involved with such a monumental endeavor. I would also like to express my gratitude to our former coordinator, Joe Burnett, for all of his service to Ventana's condor restoration program over the years. His dedication and innovative ideas are second to none and I am certain he will continue to make positive contributions to the recovery program from his new post at the Oregon Zoo.

My recent move to California is proving to be a welcome change from the blustery, subzero winters of Michigan. I would like to devote the remainder of the text to the Pinnacles site and the condors.

Before I proceed with the updates, I would like to welcome Katy McCune aboard as our new rearing specialist. She will be spending most of her time closely observing our young birds in the release facility and monitoring their progress. I would also like to recognize Liva Coe and Rachel Richardson, our field interns, for their dedication to the project. Field interns are an integral part of our condor program and contribute greatly to our daily field operations. Whether it is tracking birds, observing feedings, placing calf carcasses for the condors, or assisting with interpretation to park visitors, they keep things going.

As Jessica Koning reported last month, the Pinnacles release site continues to progress extremely well. I am happy to report that we successfully transferred two young condors from the Hopper Mountain facility to our Pinnacles release facility in early March. This brings our Pinnacles population to eight individuals (6 free-flying and 2 captive). We plan to transfer four more young condors from the Los Angeles Zoo in late April.

The two young females currently in the release facility are adapting extremely well to their new surroundings and have been interacting with Hoi (the adult mentor) and the six free-flying males on a regular basis. This was quite apparent during the first two weeks following the transfer as the



free-flying birds were very curious about the new arrivals and spent more time around the facility. I look forward to observing, and reporting to everyone, the social hierarchy that will develop as four more young birds are brought into our release facility.

Although the release facility, and tall pines in close proximity to the facility, are favored perch and roost sites of the birds, they continue to use areas within the park away from the release site. It is not uncommon to see the birds soaring over the high peaks in such locations as Hawkins Peak, Scout Peak, and Mt. Defiance. The birds have frequently utilized tall rock spires and grey pines in these areas as perches and roost sites. Although the condors' presence in the high peaks area of the park offers a unique viewing opportunity to park visitors, I can't stress enough the importance of maintaining your distance in the event that you come across a perched bird while using the trail system. These young birds can be very curious, so while your temptation may be to approach out of your own curiosity, or to get the perfect snapshot, this could have long term negative effects on the bird's behavior and potentially puts you and the bird at risk of injury. Our goal is to prevent the birds from developing any positive association with humans, so your cooperation will keep the birds wild and most certainly contribute to the long term success of the Pinnacles release site. A general rule of thumb is to maintain a minimum of 100 feet between yourself and a bird spotted while visiting the park. Further information can be acquired from the [National Park Service's Pinnacles website](#) and by paying a visit to the park and catching a glimpse of the birds first hand.

Within the last two weeks of March the birds have begun to make movements outside of the park boundaries and have been using perch and roost sites on private and BLM land. This is evident from the GPS locations we have been receiving from condor 287 and from our daily radio tracking of VHF-marked condors. We currently have one GPS tag deployed and it belongs to condor 287, while the remainder of the birds are marked with conventional VHF radiotransmitters. It was quite fortuitous that 287 was chosen to wear a GPS tag since he seems to be the most adventurous individual in the group. He has made movements of up 20 miles to the east and south of the park. We suspect that other birds have recently made movements of this magnitude based on 287's locations and the fact that we have had two occasions where signals for the other five have disappeared to the east and south. 287, however, has been making these flights since release.

Unfortunately, I do not have pictures to share with you for the month of March; however, I will include photos of the new birds in the release pen and hopefully some shots of our 6 free flying birds in the high peaks in the next edition of the field notes. I'm sure my format for the field notes will change as I settle into my new position, so please bear with me and feel free to offer suggestions. I will do my best to respond and make changes.

Until next month!

Cheers

-- Curt Mykut, Condor Program Coordinator

## Notes from the Field, February 2004:

### Big Sur Update



In the grand tradition of February in Big Sur, there were some immense storms rolling off the famed pineapple express this month. High winds, heavy precipitation and power outages were the result. These conditions seem to inconvenience people far more than condors even though we live inside! Condors have feathers that are waterproofed by an oil gland at the base of their tail. Frequent and careful preening helps distribute this oil evenly over all feather surfaces. The water beads up and rolls right off of them! Condors also have an adjustable "hood" of delicate feathers they can use to keep their heads dry. The condors' favorite bad weather roost in the big redwoods at the mouth of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park was used often this month. They like the top third of the biggest trees. A few condors have also been venturing further north, into the East Molera and Little Sur River drainage area.

February is traditionally a month that has a lot of reproductive activity for breeding age condors. This February we received the news that two female condors released by Ventana Wildlife Society are behaving as though they are incubating eggs! These condors are currently residing in southern California. It has taken 5 years in the wild for our condors to reach breeding age, and we are very pleased that they are making this important life step. A wild condor chick has not fledged from its nest in California since the early 1980's, so we have great hopes for this breeding season.



The condors overwintering in Big Sur are courting and showing pairing behaviors, but there is no sign as yet of reproduction. .

### Pinnacles Update

The Pinnacles release site is progressing very well. Recent additions to the Ventana Wildlife Society staff monitoring that population have made the huge amount of work that goes into a new release site much more manageable. In future months, Curt Mykut will be writing the Pinnacles update, since he puts in so much quality field time there.

The big news is that all 6 condors have been using the famous Pinnacles rock formations accessible via the High Peaks trail. This is evidence that their flying skills have improved and their range has increased.

The High Peaks trail is an excellent way to enjoy the national monument and

view condors. We have received many reports of people hiking in this area and getting fabulous views of the birds. Since condors are endangered please keep in mind that condors should never be fed or approached closely. Stay on the trails and respect signs that say "Closed area". Vultures are often curious, but condors that get comfortable around people often need to be recaptured. Please help keep all of the Pinnacles condors in the wild! Feel free to report your sighting to Pinnacles ranger staff or send us an email.

Early in March, young condors from southern California will be transferred to Pinnacles. These condors will probably be released next fall, doubling the Pinnacles population to 12 condors. We are looking forward to the wild condors' response to the new birds in the flight pen. They are always interested in meeting new condors.

*--Jessica Koning, Big Sur Field Supervisor  
with input from Eric Stover, Interim Coordinator for Pinnacles*

### Notes from the Field, January 2004:

#### Big Sur Update

The month of January was surprisingly temperate here in Big Sur. Some rain drifted through here and there, but the interludes were nothing but warm, sunny, breezy days. The condors responded by moving leisurely through the Big Sur area. A current activity area is the regal stand of redwoods at the mouth of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. A brief climb up the Valley View trail inside the park will give a wonderful view of the condors in the tops of the trees. Other viewing possibilities are the sea lion beaches south of the Big Sur valley along the sheer and rocky coastlines.



Condors fed on a sea lion that washed up dead near Coast Gallery this month, and they are still overflying that area. Gray whale migration is nearing its peak, and the view from a high coastal cliff could yield both a whale spout and a condor. Courtship displays continue, and pairs of condors can frequently be seen flying closely in formation, a sign that the two birds may become mates.

Ventana biologists are monitoring the increased condor activity along the Highway 1 corridor. If you are passing through the area and see someone waving an antenna about, stop and say hi. We have recently added an new intern, Katy, who has been a huge help; there are now 4 people to monitor 18 condors!



## Pinnacles Update



Last month's condor release at Pinnacles National Monument was quite a transition for both the newly released condors and for the biologists watching them. A couple of the condors had to be recaptured for brief "time-outs" in the Pinnacles flight pen, but as of January 24, all six condors are back out in the wild and doing great. They are all becoming skilled at landing in trees, and are refining their other flying skills. Condor 287 is still the most adventurous, expanding his range into the famed pinnacles inside the monument that gave the park its name. The prominent and striking rock faces in that area make wonderful perches for the condors and many hikers have seen condor 287 in the High Peaks area of the park. The other condors are sticking closer to the release area, but have recently been exploring Chalone Creek. This drainage has many large trees, and is a good roosting spot. The recent rains have also formed some pools, good drinking and bathing areas for condors.

All of the wild condors at Pinnacles have black tags with white numbers painted on them. Since they are all young birds, their heads are gray and their white underwings are mottled with brown. There are quite a few Golden Eagles at the park, so look for the darker coloration, the wing tags, and the larger wingspan of the condor.

The next group of condors to be released at Pinnacles will be transferred to the Pinnacles flight pen next month. The tentative plan is to release them next fall. By the time they are released, the condors in the wild now will be wonderful leaders for the new cohort.

Until next time...

*--Jessica Koning, Big Sur Field Supervisor  
with input from Eric Stover, Interim Coordinator for Pinnacles*

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