

## California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*)

Status - Federal: Endangered      State: Endangered



Photo: Steve Davidson



Photo: Herbert Clarke

With a wingspan approaching 3 meters (9.75 feet), the California Condor is the largest flying bird in North America. The adult is black with a large, triangular white patch extending from the base of each underwing along the wing's entire leading edge. In younger birds, this patch is mottled black and white. The skin

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of the condor's unfeathered head is reddish orange to yellow in adults and gray in immature birds. Fully grown, the bird measures 1.2 m (3.75 feet) long and weighs more than 9 kg (20 lb). Strictly carrion eaters, condors scavenge carcasses of large animals such as cattle and deer.

**Range:** In the early 1800s, the species ranged along the Pacific Coast from British Columbia to Baja California. By the late 1970s, this range had shrunk to a limited region surrounding the southern San Joaquin Valley. Ongoing efforts for the recovery of this species include

captive breeding and releases into the wild. Currently the total California condor population is estimated at 300 individuals. This includes 145 in captivity and 155 in the wild population. Studies have shown that the birds use separate habitats for foraging and breeding: while breeding sites have been found at higher elevations, foraging habitat lies in foothills predominantly covered by grassland or oak-woodland. The above map shows the condor's overall range including both breeding and foraging areas. In recent years, California condors released by the National Park Service appear to be expanding their range northward. Data shows the birds exploring areas in Northern Santa Clara County and western Merced and Stanislaus Counties.

**Endangerment:** Lead poisoning is the biggest threat facing the successful recovery of the California condor. Since 1997, twelve condors from the California population have been confirmed to have died after ingesting lead and many more lead-related deaths are suspected. Over 100 others have received emergency treatment for lead poisoning. The primary source of lead is from spent ammunition that remains in carcasses after they are shot. The entrails and areas that are trimmed away and left behind are often contaminated with hundreds of small fragments of lead. Because condors feed on carrion, and even small amounts of lead can sicken or kill a condor, they are especially susceptible to poisoning.



California Department of Pesticide Regulation  
Endangered Species Project  
[www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/endspec/index.htm](http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/endspec/index.htm)

