

CALIFORNIA CONDOR
(GYMNOGYPS CALIFORNIANUS)

Federal/California status: Endangered/Endangered



Description

The California condor is the largest North American landbird with a length of 46 inches (117 cm) and a wing span of 8-9 feet (2.4-2.7 m). Adult condors are almost entirely black with the exception of a bare, reddish head, white patch on upper surface of inner wing, and white underwing coverts visible in flight. Immature condors are similar in appearance to the adults, but have a bare, gray head, lack the white on the wings, and have extensive mottling on the underwing.

Habitat

This species will forage over rugged terrain such as chaparral, arid foothills, ridge tops, and open savanna. The California condor may find much of its food by watching other scavengers such as turkey vultures and common ravens. It feeds exclusively on carrion and has never been documented to attack a living animal. Its diet consists of dead large animals such as deer and cattle. Nests are typically located in a cave or large crevice of a cliff within mountainous terrain. Nests are occasionally constructed of gravel, stones, or debris, but often no nesting material is used.

Range/distribution

The California condor experienced a dramatic population decline throughout the twentieth century. Reasons for its decline included shooting, secondary poisoning, and collisions with power lines. In the mid 1980's, the few remaining wild condors had been placed in captivity for a breeding program. Attempts have recently been made to release some of these captive-bred condors into the wild. Although it was historically documented in southern Kern County as far north as Fresno County, now it is an extremely rare visitor to the San Joaquin Valley.

Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Image Library, URL: <http://images.fws.gov>, accessed June 6, 2002.

References

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