

# Lead continues to be a serious threat to California condor populations

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The California condor was one of the first species to be listed under the Endangered Species Preservation Act in 1966 when the population was reduced to a handful of birds. Through a massive collaborative effort that included fieldwork and breeding in zoos, the condor population has grown to more than 400 birds, more than half of which are now free-flying in the wild. Unfortunately, there is overwhelming evidence that lead poisoning from accidental ingestion of spent ammunition is the leading cause of death in the wild population, and this may prevent the establishment of self-sustaining populations.

"After reviewing nearly 20 years of our mortality data on the free-ranging [birds](#), it became clear that [lead poisoning](#) is the primary problem for the birds in the wild. And this is not just a problem for California condors. We can view them as an indicator species, warning us about the hazards of widespread lead contamination in the environment." said Bruce Rideout, director of the wildlife disease laboratories for San Diego Zoo Global.

Our collaborators at the Wildlife Health Center at the School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California at Davis recently published a review of the impact of [lead](#) in ammunition on scavenging birds and what it means for the health of our shared environment. The review article can be found in the January edition of the journal *EcoHealth*.

Bringing species back from the brink of extinction is the goal of San

Diego Zoo Global. As a leader in [conservation](#), the work of San Diego Zoo Global includes onsite wildlife conservation efforts (representing both plants and animals) at the San Diego Zoo, San Diego Zoo Safari Park, and San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research, as well as international field programs on six continents. The important conservation and science work of these entities is made possible by the San Diego Zoo Global Wildlife Conservancy and is supported in part by the Foundation of San Diego Zoo Global.

Provided by Zoological Society of San Diego

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