

# **Editorial: Let's celebrate the California condor success story**

March 29 2021, by Mercury News & East Bay Times Editorial Boards

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Life in the midst of a pandemic offers precious little to celebrate, but the California condor success story should warm all of our hearts.

America's largest birds—their wingspan stretches to 9 feet, 2 feet wider than [bald eagles](#)—were so close to extinction that they were placed on the federal endangered species list in 1967. In the 1980s, three out of four condors in the wild were either dead or dying from lead poisoning. Eventually, only 22 remained.

Today, there are 504 California condors with 329 flying in the wild. If you happen to spot one—think turkey vultures on steroids—and have binoculars to read the tag number under their wings, you can find the name, age and history of the bird at [condorspotter.com](http://condorspotter.com).

Biologists are working to extend the release of condors to Redwood National Park in northern California, expanding the range of the species from the Baja Peninsula to the Oregon border. If successful, it will mark the first time that condors have hovered over the Klamath River and the region's majestic redwoods in more than a century.

The ultimate goal is to release condors throughout the Northwest, where they once roamed as far north as British Columbia and as far east as the Rocky Mountains.

The decision to capture the only remaining condors and breed them in zoos wasn't without controversy. Renowned environmentalist David Brower said that creating artificial environments where condors would be bred equated to a "kind of immorality." But the program, which involved building feeding stations to train young condors how to forage for food in the wild, is a major success story.

Condors lay only one egg every year, the lowest reproductive rate of any bird. It takes six years for condors to reach adulthood, and they can live up to 60 years.

By 1994, the captive condors had laid more than 100 eggs. In 2011, for

the first time in decades, condors were spotted roaming over Bay Area skies, with five of the birds perching atop a Lick Observatory dome.

Condors are capable of traveling up to 150 miles in a day, soaring and gliding for hours thousands of feet overhead, searching for the dead animals (think deer and cattle) that they eat. The birds, which weigh between 20-24 pounds, can eat between 2-3 pounds in a day and often go days without eating again.

The future of condors is far from certain.

The Dolan Fire that raged across Big Sur last fall killed 11 condors. But the Bay Area News Group reported last week that a 23-year-old female [condor](#), dubbed Redwood Queen, in February laid an egg in the top of a charred redwood tree that flames had blackened in August.

It offered inspiration to Kelly Sorensen of the nonprofit group Ventana Wildlife Society, which helps lead efforts to restore condors.

She spoke for many when interviewed by this newspaper last week, saying, "These [birds](#) aren't giving up. Neither are we."

MediaNews Group, Inc.

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Editorial: Let's celebrate the California condor success story (2021, March 29) retrieved 20 June 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2021-03-editorial-celebrate-california-condor-success.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.