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News Release

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First Condor Nest at Pinnacles National Monument in Over 100 Years

Pinnacles National Monument – Biologists at Pinnacles National Monument have verified the first California condor nest in the monument in over 100 years. Condor 317, a female released at the monument as a 1 ½ year old bird in 2004, has paired with a nearly seven year old male, Condor 318, originally released along the Big Sur coast by Ventana Wildlife Society. This is the first breeding attempt by either condor. The adult condors were tracked using radio telemetry and global positioning technology to the nest site. They were also observed performing courtship behaviors for nearly a month before an egg was confirmed.

“We are thrilled that after being involved with the Condor Recovery Program since 2003, the park has its first nest in over 100 years,” said Eric Brunnemann, Park Superintendent. “. . .and conveniently Condors 317 and 318 chose a nest cave that can be easily viewed by the public from the Scout Peak bench on the High Peaks Trail,” continued Brunnemann. Although the areas directly around the nest cliff will be closed to public use for the duration of the nesting period, public viewing is still possible. The strenuous hike to the viewing area is approximately two miles from the closest East or West Side parking areas. From the west, the elevation gain is



approximately 1100 feet, and from the east it is over 1200 feet. Please ask in the Visitor Center for more complete directions to the viewing area.

A temporary closure area around the nest cliff is in effect during the 2010 breeding season. An area extending from Western Front to Goat Rock and north to the edge of the Juniper Canyon Trail will be closed to protect the nesting birds. The Juniper Canyon and High Peaks trails remain open. Park visitors interested in off trail activities within the Monument should consult with a park ranger for specific guidance. Violation of this emergency closure is punishable by a fine of not more than \$500 or imprisonment for not exceeding six months, or both (36 CFR §1.5(f) or 16 U.S.C §§1531-1543).

Biologists will be closely monitoring the nest to determine if the new parents succeed in incubating the egg and rearing a young bird to fledge from the high rocky cliff. Condor eggs take an average of 57 days to hatch. Nestlings remain flightless for an additional 5½ to 6 months. Park Service biologists expect that if the new parents successfully rear a young condor, it would take its first flight in early October.

History of the Pinnacles Condor Program

Pinnacles National Monument was chosen as a California condor release site due to historical documentation of condors in the area, good cliff nesting opportunities, and large expanses of intact habitat in the region.

There have been six groups of condors released at Pinnacles National Monument, bringing the current total to 26 free-flying condors. 2009 marked the first year that a Pinnacles released condor nested. Condor 313 paired with Condor 303 who laid an egg in a rocky outcrop at the RS Bar Guest Ranch in southern San Benito County. Although Condor 303 died before her



nestling took his first flight, the juvenile survived and continues to fly over San Benito County.


With the approval of the National Park Service and others involved in the condor recovery effort, the owners and operators of the RS Bar Guest Ranch formed an unprecedented relationship with the Pinnacles Partnership, a nonprofit organization supporting the monument, so visitors could have the opportunity to take guided trips to the remote nest site, where the nesting pair and their offspring could frequently be viewed for extended periods.

National Park Biologists are working with partners at the Ventana Wildlife Society and community volunteers to build a self-sustaining population of condors in central California over the next several years. This will contribute to one of the US Fish and Wildlife Service Recovery Plan goals by establishing a population in California of 150 or more condors with at least 15 breeding pairs.

History of the California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*)

Condors maintained a strong population in the American West until the mid-19th century, when shooting, poisoning from lead and strychnine, egg collecting, and general habitat degradation began to take a heavy toll. Between the mid-1880s and 1924, there were scattered reports of condors in Arizona. But by the late 1930s, all remaining condors were found only in California and the mid-1980's, the total population had dwindled to just 22 birds.

As a result of the continued downward spiral of the condor population, the California condor was placed on the federal endangered species list in 1967. In the early 1980s, an intensive captive breeding program rescued the species from extinction and in the 1990s reestablishment efforts began in southern California. Since that time, release sites have also been launched in northern Arizona, along the Big Sur coast, at Pinnacles National Monument, and on the Baja Peninsula in Mexico.



The current world population of California condors numbers 348. Ninety-five birds are flying free in California, eighteen in Baja Mexico, and seventy-four in Arizona. An additional 161 are in captive breeding centers.

Challenges to Condor Recovery


For recovery of an endangered species to succeed, it is necessary to change the conditions that lead to their decline. Egg collecting is no longer a significant threat, the effects of DDT are likely to diminish over the coming century, and poisoning of bait carcasses for predator control is no longer an established practice.

The primary threat remaining to California condor recovery is lead poisoning. Condors inadvertently ingest lead bullet fragments when animal carcasses, or their gut piles, shot with lead ammunition remain on the landscape. For this reason, the California legislature outlawed the use of lead ammunition for big game hunting and depredation within the condor's range. For more information, see: <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/hunting/condor>

The Institute for Wildlife Studies (<http://www.iws.org>) works to disseminate information of the effectiveness and availability of non-lead ammunition.

Partners in Recovery

The reestablishment of California condors to Pinnacles is a cooperative effort between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (www.fws.gov), National Park Service (www.nps.gov/pinn), Ventana Wildlife Society (www.ventanaws.org), the Institute for Wildlife Studies (www.iws.org), Pinnacles Partnership (www.pinnaclespartnership.org), and community volunteers.



The San Diego Wild Animal Park, Los Angeles Zoo, the World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho, and the Oregon Zoo breed condors destined for release in California, Arizona, and Baja, Mexico. The Pinnacles condor release site is an important link in the overall condor recovery effort.

Further details of the program are available on the Pinnacles National Monument website at www.nps.gov/pinn or by calling Pinnacles National Monument at (831) 389-4485.

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