



Pinnacles National Monument

5000 Hwy 146
Paicines, CA 95043

(831) 389-4485 phone
(831) 389-4489 fax
www.nps.gov/pinn



Ventana Wilderness Society

19045 Portola Dr.
Salinas, CA 93908

(831) 455-9514 phone
(831) 455-2846 fax
www.ventanaws.org

Ventana Wilderness Society □ Pinnacles National Monument News Release

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Tom Leatherman , PNM (831) 389-4485 x 222
Kelly Sorenson, VWS (831) 455-9514



More California Condors Will Fly Free at Pinnacles National Monument

On Saturday, September 17, a new group of California condors will be released into the wild at Pinnacles National Monument, 80 miles south of San Jose. This third release of the endangered birds at the park is the first on a weekend. Project biologists anticipate releasing up to 30 condors at Pinnacles, a historic breeding ground for the massive birds, over the next several years. The reintroduction of California condors to Pinnacles National Monument is a cooperative effort between the Ventana Wilderness Society and the National Park Service in partnership with the California Condor Recovery Team.

“We are proud to be a part of the recovery of this magnificent species, and are excited about providing an opportunity for more people to attend the release event,” said Park Superintendent Tom Leatherman.

Seven juvenile condors -- six male and one female -- will be set free in Pinnacles National Monument this fall, joining the park’s seven wild resident condors. The seven juvenile condors are 16-18 months old and were hatched at the Los Angeles Zoo, San Diego Wild Animal Park, and the Oregon Zoo. Condor #340 from Oregon is this breeding facility’s first ever captive-bred condor. They have been acclimating to their new home in a 20 foot by 40 foot flight pen at Pinnacles since their arrival at the site in spring, 2005. Sometime this winter, six more juvenile condors are expected to arrive at the Pinnacles. Those birds likely will be released in 2006.

“It is finally a reality – California condors are once again free-flying in the Gabilan and Diablo mountains, where this species was absent for over 30 years. **We are well on our way of reaching our overall goal.** We are successful because of a great deal of hard work and dedication from all of the Recovery Team collaborators,” said Ventana Wilderness Society Executive Director Kelly Sorenson.

Ventana Wilderness Society, which has been conducting condor releases in Big Sur, California since 1997, teamed up with the National Park Service in 2003 to reintroduce condors to Pinnacles National Monument. **Thirty-three condors are now in the wild as a result of their efforts.**

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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 is an important link in the overall condor recovery effort.

From a population low of 22 birds in the mid-1980s, condors have rebounded through intensive captive breeding efforts. **Today 153 are in captivity at the captive breeding facilities listed above, and throughout California 57 are in the wild.** The overall goal for California is to have 150 free-flying condors in the state.

The public is invited to attend the September 17, 10:00 a.m. event and witness the release of the condors from a viewing area located approximately a mile from the facility. The release will take place on the east side of the park off of Highway 25. Shuttle services from designated parking areas will transport guests to within a mile and a quarter of viewing area. Guests unable to walk the remaining mile can request special assistance. Spotting scopes, binoculars, water, layered clothing and good hiking shoes are highly recommended. Parking is limited, and is on a first come, first served basis; arrival by 8:00 a.m. is recommended. Further details of the release event are available on the Pinnacles National Monument website at www.nps.gov/pinn or by calling Pinnacles National Monument at 831-389-4485 x 224.

www.ventanaws.org

Ventana Wilderness Society has been conserving native wildlife and their habitats for close to 30 years. In 1997, their expertise in wildlife restoration allowed VWS to become the first private, non-profit organization to be responsible for releasing and monitoring California condors in the wild. VWS has been responsible for 33 of California's total free-flying condor population. In addition to their work with condors, VWS has been involved with the restoration of prairie falcons, peregrine falcons and bald eagles to the Big Sur and Central Coast Region. VWS also monitors songbird populations and carries out a number of research contracts through the Big Sur Ornithology Lab, including identifying bird responses to habitat restoration and tracking monarch butterfly population fluctuations and migration patterns. Ventana Wilderness Society also provides innovative and exciting environmental education and internship opportunities to youth and young adults throughout the Central Coast Region.

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The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. Established in 1908, Pinnacles National Monument preserves 24,000 acres encompassing the spectacular remnants of an ancient volcano, talus caves, a rich array of California native plant and animal communities, and a vibrant cultural and historical legacy. Pinnacles is a highly dynamic landscape, shaped by earthquakes, floods and fires. Nearly 70 percent of the park is designated wilderness, and preserves the wilderness qualities of unspoiled habitat, natural quiet, dark night skies and solitude in a rapidly developing region of California. Pinnacles National Monument is the first national park unit to serve as a release site for California condors.

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