

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

124 SPEAR SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA 94105

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1-22-82

Wear Eliot -

Here's one bird you haven't photographed, n'est-ce pas? I'd like your reaction to all this.

The status of the wild California condor in 1982 looks much better than you may have recently been hearing, thanks to the thirteenth of The Condor Question's twenty-four steps for rescuing the bird. With a little more effort on the other twenty-three steps, the hazards of capture and captive breeding can be avoided. Here are some reasons why we think so.

Condor population. The Condor Research Center has been basing the urgency of its proposed captive-breeding program on a population of 20-30 birds compared to their estimate of 50-60 as recently as 1960. You may remember they told the Fish and Game Commission last July that the condor would be extinct within twelve years without a capture program. Carl Koford's estimate in 1962 was 43 birds, and in 1974 the 1969 minimum estimate of 53 was revised down to 39, based on the same data. Thanks to a new emphasis on intensive field observation, the present population is now estimated to exceed 30. This hardly shows the rate of decline claimed by the proponents of capture. They're still juggling the numbers, however.

Current reproduction. Early claims that no appreciable reproduction was taking place in the wild have been shown to be false. Thanks to Step 13, it now looks as if there are four or more courting pairs and nine or more juveniles in the population - all of which augurs well for the condor.

Field identification. The Condor Research Center has claimed that capture, marking, and radio-telemetry are the only means of identifying individual condors and learning enough about their habits to save them. Step 13 has shown that feather-moult patterns are individual and thus condors can be identified without capture and marking. Long-range photography helps. Condors are not that camera-shy. Better lens-on than hands-on. The State-appointed Condor Advisory Committee recommended against any captures for marking because the risks outweigh the gains.

Research on surrogates. The alleged success may not withstand the independent review urged in The Condor Question. Four of eleven captive-bred Andean condors released in 1981 have died. Moreover, funds allocated for research into the effects of toxic chemicals on cathartid vultures may be withheld by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Apprehension. The team has killed one chick in 1981, lost two surrogate turkey vultures, and started a forest fire. They recently suggested that the capture program may well cause the injury or death of more condors, yet the scaled-down capture program is beginning this month nonetheless.

Captive breeding is no panacea. It has produced few conspicuous successes, a multitude of uncertainties, unresolved problems, and tragic losses. We have another book underway to cure overoptimism.

Traditional naturalists can save the condor. An understanding public, not macho-biology, is their essential ally.

all the best,
Walter Brower

Committed to the preservation, restoration, and rational use of the biosphere

TWENTY-FOUR STEPS TO SAVE THE CONDOR

- 1 Restore Land and Water Conservation Fund and acquire Key parcels of condor habitat
- 2 Formulate list of important parcels for acquisition using FY82 Energy Resources Fund, California State funding available, in part, for natural resource enhancement
- 3 Strengthen ties with private organizations interested in acquiring habitat and/or easements for the condor.
- 4 Act upon California Fish and Game Commission recommendation to encourage designation of the Sespe-Frazier Wilderness
- 5 Implement management to improve habitat for condors; controlled burns, etc.
- 6 Confront excessive use of off-road vehicles in condor area
- 7 Undertake extensive sign posting campaign immediately (see mock-up)
- 8 Provide shooting area for hunters outside of condor use area
- 9 Ban firearms possession in off-season
- 10 Implement neglected recommendations of Condor Law Enforcement Strategy and fund as high priority
- 11 Advertise DFG hotline in condor area for reporting violations
- 12 Press for firearms closure on Mt. Pinos
- 13 Protect all active nesting, roosting, feeding, and watering areas from disturbance by biologists, photographers, and the public
- 14 Expand observation program; investigate additional historic nest sites
- 15 Prohibit removal of any condor eggs or nestlings
- 16 Require independent biologic assessments of population status, reproductive activity, estimated nesting success, and surrogate research data (see Condor Research Center (Ventura, CA) Draft fact sheet)
- 17 Require evaluation of turkey vulture telemetry in condor range before judging permit
- 18 Intensify study of the effects of 1080 and use patterns on raptors; burden of proof should be on users
- 19 Consolidate efforts by appointing habitat protection team, separate from research function
- 20 Thoroughly examine land use questions and rancher application of pesticides
- 21 Monitor conflict between condor recovery and planned exploitation (i.e. Los Padres oil & gas leasing)
- 22 Explore tax incentive for protection of range land
- 23 Require preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement before judging permit request
- 24 Existing assessment is erroneous in suggesting a finding of no significant impact
- 25 Require USFWS to honor commitment to fund biologist from DFG to work on recovery effort
- 26 Reject any open-ended permits

NEWS FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

530 7th Street, S.E., Washington, D. C. 20003 • 202/543-4312

124 Spear Street, San Francisco, CA 94105 • 415/495-4770

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VOICES FROM THE CONDOR QUESTION

Dr. Carl Koford: "Do we want to replace wild condors with cage-bred hand-raised birds? A wild condor is much more than feathers, flesh and genes. Its behavior results not only from its anatomy and germ plasm but from its long cultural heritage, learned by each bird from previous generations through several years of immature life. A cage-raised bird can never be more than a partial replicate of a wild condor. If we cannot preserve condors in the wild through understanding their environmental relations, we have already lost the battle and may be no more successful in preserving mankind."

Dr. Alden Miller: "The California condor is a majestic bird seen in its natural rugged environment as it sweeps in superbly controlled flight over crests of ridges and great slopes of tangled chaparral. The air passing through its wing tips sets up a steady whine as it is pressed into service to keep the great glider aloft. The condor passes overhead, the sound recedes, and the bird now circles and scans with keen eyes the ground below and the activities of its fellow condors. Here is a picture long to be remembered, a heritage from the past displaying the acme of a specialization for flight which we are still privileged to view as part of our natural esthetic resource."

Ian McMillan: "If our society was openly and willfully working to drive the condor into extinction, the known practices by which to achieve such a result could hardly have been more thoroughly and efficiently applied and the outcome could hardly be more conclusive."

"The condor has been aptly compared to a canary in a coal mine: when the canary languishes, the environment has become hostile to man. It is barbarism, not civilization, that has destroyed the condor -- barbarism with guns, poison, the bulldozer and ruinous economic growth."

Eben McMillan: "What is really important right now is to find those things that are causing the decrease in the condor population. As soon as we find this out, then we can go about all those other things. But I don't really see any purpose in spending alot of time looking for solutions to the house on fire; by the



time you come back, there will only be a pile of ashes."

Dick Smith: "Inoffensive to mankind, this remarkable bird has suffered greatly from man's ignorance, superstition and intolerance. Even the knowledge we now have concerning the California condor has been gained at great cost to his numbers. Man has been, and continues to be, the deciding factor in the survival of this ancient species."

Dr. A. S. Leopold: "Unless the causes of reproductive failure are understood and corrected there is nothing to be gained by pen-raising birds and putting them back in an unreceptive environment."

David R. Brower: "There can be a new Ark, and it is not too late for the splendid creature the condor is - and for many lesser ones we have yet to learn about. The miraculous flow of information in their wild genes, their unique chemistries, and their love of life can be passed on. We need not be wanton and banish them. They can survive and hold onto their freedom."

"We dare not let the last wilderness on earth go down by our own hand, and hope that technology will somehow get us to a new wilderness on some remote planet. Or that somehow we can save little samples of genes in bottles, or on ice, isolated and manageable, or reduce the great vistas to longlasting videotape, destroying the originals to sustain the balance of trade and of eons."

Dr. David DeSante: "I believe that the California condor can be saved - in its present range and habitat and without high-risk biotechnical research methods and/or captive propagation. What is needed is a total commitment to the immediate protection of the condors' habitat and range, and a total commitment to the initiation of a sound research program to be carried out virtually entirely by traditional methods."

"If any animal can command the massive public sentiment and support necessary to save it and its habitat, the condor can. Gymnogyps californianus sailing free and majestically over the rugged terrain of southern California mountains represents, more than any other sight in North America, the splendor and freedom of the natural world. We will not have many more chances to preserve that sight."

David R. Brower: "It should help us to wonder what kinds of places are necessary to let the condors' spirit fly. What sustains their condorness? What sounds, smells, and sights, what flow of wildness? What tradition or social custom? It must surely be tradition, for example, that persuades condors to use the same roosting tree on the Tejon Ranch for thirty-five years. They find that ranch part of their social custom, a keystone, more aptly, in the mountain arc they range, and they could collapse without it. A huge keystone it is, a ranch occupying nearly two hundred eighty thousand acres where the San Joaquin Valley yields to the Tehachapis. It harbors a large roosting and foraging area for the condors."

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THE CONDOR QUESTION: CAPTIVE OR FOREVER FREE?

The most controversial endangered species program in US history has resulted from the US Fish and Wildlife Service's \$25 million plan to capture condors, radio-tag them, determine their sex by surgery, and ultimately place them in zoos for experiments in captive breeding.

The Condor Question, Friends of the Earth's new book, challenges this program. Only thirty of the huge, rare birds are thought to remain, all in a small mountain area behind Santa Barbara, California, and the "Recovery Program" is a much a threat to them as it is a potential aid. In June of 1980, one of only two condors hatched that year died at the hands of recovery team members.

The Condor Question presents a chorus of voices calling for a naturalistic approach to the recovery of condors. It is an appeal to protect condors in the wild, rather than subject them to the risks of capture and captive breeding. Scientists and naturalists, including Dr. Carl Koford, Anne and Paul Ehrlich, A. Starker Leopold, Eben and Ian McMillan, and Dick Smith share their knowledge of the bird and its needs and question the capture program. Between them, these writers hold more knowledge about condors than anyone on the official recovery team - yet up to now, their advice has been ignored.



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The book supports many scientists' beliefs that the hands-on program doesn't attack the cause of the condors' plight. Indiscriminate shooting, poisoning, oil and gas development, harassment, and land conversion continue largely unchecked. The interviews and writings in The Condor Question support FOE's conclusion that the condor will be saved only by protecting the wild population and stopping the destruction of its critical habitat. The book provides a 24 point alternative plan of benign research, hands-off techniques, and specific proposals for protecting condor habitat. It opposes the drastic manipulation of condors planned to begin in early 1982, instead recommending that the funds available be redirected to confront known threats that continue to plague wild condors.

By heeding the conclusions of The Condor Question, federal and state officials could avoid the further risks of injury or death to more condors as well as the excessive expenditures for computers, radio-telemetry devices, tracking towers, and zoo facilities. Rather than pushing the condor closer to extinction, the naturalistic plan shows the way to a sustainable condor population in a protected environment.

The Condor Question explores the confrontation between natural and hands-on research as a major element in the controversy over how to save the condors. The outcome of this debate will decide the fate of the condor. It will also affect the fate of the 500,000 to 2 million birds that are that face extinction by the year 2000 as overexpanding human activities destroy their habitats.

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*I cannot tell the truth.
I can only say what I know.*

—Native of James Bay, 1979c.

In this series

The Whaling Question
(*The Inquiry by Sir Sidney Frost of Australia*)
The Condor Question: Captive, or Forever Free?

*The best thing that can happen to a condor nest
is that nobody finds it. —CARL KOFORD*

The Condor Question

CAPTIVE OR FOREVER FREE?