

Flight Of PASSAGE

Bird preservation has taken big steps forward, thanks to one young California condor.



WHEN A BIRD NAMED CONDOR 305 took flight from a cave in the Grand Canyon last November, bird lovers rejoiced.

It was a monumental step for the California condor, a bird on the Endangered Species List since 1967. Many experts say the flight of Condor 305 might be the first of a condor nestling in Arizona in more than 100 years. A nestling is a baby still living with its parents and learning to fly.

These majestic birds with wingspans of up to nine-and-a-half feet once soared from British Columbia, along the West Coast and through the southwestern United States.

Yet by 1982, only 22 condors were left.

Like other endangered animals, condors suffered from the effects of a growing human population. Shootings, collisions into power lines and lead poisoning all led to the decline. Additionally, condors have naturally low reproductive rates. After reaching maturity, a condor lays only one egg every other year.

Help came from the Peregrine Fund, an organization that helps preserve birds of prey.

The Peregrine Fund headquarters, the World Center for Birds of Prey, has a

captive population of 20 breeding pairs of condors, says Jeff Cilek of the Peregrine Fund. Cilek says the condors from this population are taken to Vermilion Cliffs in the Grand Canyon for their release when they are a few months old.

Since its first flight, which Peregrine Fund Field Manager Sophie Osborn described as a "semi-controlled free fall," Condor 305 has been trying out its wings for more frequent and longer flights, no doubt preparing for the day it can truly leave the nest.

—Karen Gibson

CALL IN THE GOATS!

Fire officials in Glendale, Calif., put **400 GOATS** in dry, brushy areas during last year's West Coast wildfires. The goats munched across seven acres of land in about two months, creating a natural firebreak. Where there's no brush, there's no fire. Hand crews normally clear brush, but goats have several benefits. They don't eat plant



roots that hold the hillsides together, helping prevent erosion. Goats will eat just about anything, including sharp twigs and tough cactus. (The fire department needs a special handler to remove poison oak.) When not needed by the fire department, the goats live on a ranch in the mountains.

—Sara van Dyck

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