

THE CONDOR

The condor is a living relic of the Pleistocene Age. It stems from the time of mastodon, mammoth and sabre-tooth tiger.

A planned dam in Sespe Canyon, California is threatening the existence of this giant bird.

The once numerous condors that Lewis and Clark called "the beautiful buzzards of the Columbia" and which were noted by early Spanish explorers for their immense size and quantity now number approximately 40. They are confined to a small area not far from Los Angeles.

Condors have been known to soar to 15,000 feet, on its 10 foot wingspan, and glide motionless for hours on hot air currents.

In early times in America, Condors were accused of carrying off lambs, calves and even children but, of course, all this has been proved false. But the Condor was regarded as an ill-omen in the early West and was shot from malice and from curiosity.

Even now, although they are protected and a person killing them could suffer a 1000 dollar fine, one or two are killed each year. The legislature has even outdone the Fish and Game Department in conservation efforts. When the department granted a permit to a zoo to trap condors, a few years ago, the legislature rose in protest and instructed the department to grant no more such permits.

Young Condors remain in their nests for almost a year and do not gain adult plumage until the age of 5 or 6. Then the plumage characteristic of the adult, triangular patches of white feathers, appear under the wings, coupled with the white patches on the shoulders and orange red heads.

They mate, probably for life, at upwards of 6 to 7, and may live as much as the four score and ten years allotted to humans, although their average life would be 40 - 50 years.

The history of man and the condor are closely linked. Cave relics and ceremonial traditions bear witness that condors were known and used by North American aborigines living in what we now call Florida, Texas and North California. The birds were worshipped as god symbols by later Californian and Western Indian tribes. Spanish explorers, such as Portola, who discovered San Francisco Bay in 1769, found Indians keeping Condors that were later sacrificed in rituals and sometimes stuffed and preserved.

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As the condor became rarer, demand increased. Museums and collectors became potential markets and the protection laws were disregarded. By 1932 the bird was reported to be down to 10 in number. But they have rallied slightly. Sanctuaries established in Santa Barbara and Ventura County have helped. The proposed dam now threatens one of these sanctuaries - the largest.

The National Audubon Society's research report indicates that the condor can be saved - if Man will save him.

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