

Four Oregon Zoo Condors to be released into the wild

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Tatoosh, Meriwether, Ursa and Wiley prepare to fly free

Four condors from the Oregon Zoo were recently sent to The Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho, for preparation leading to release in the wild in Arizona. Among these birds is Tatoosh (No. 367), born in April 2005, the second condor to be hatched in Oregon in more than a century. The others are Meriwether (No. 379), also hatched in 2005, and Ursa (No. 404) and Wiley (No. 420), both hatched in the spring of 2006.

Tatoosh and Meriwether are slated for release this summer into the Vermilion Cliffs National Monument of northern Arizona, and the younger two will be released during the summer of 2008. A video showing their capture from the zoo's breeding facility can be seen at <http://www.oregonzoo.org/VideoArchive/CondorMove.htm>.

The zoo also acquired a new condor, known as No. 385, from The Peregrine Fund. Condor No. 385 hatched in May 2005 and is considered too "genetically valuable" to be released into the wild, according to assistant condor curator Shawn St. Michael. The zoo plans to use No. 385 for breeding purposes when he reaches maturity in six years.

Meriwether (seen here perched on a log) remains calm before his capture at the Jonsson Center for Wildlife Conservation. Meriwether and three other condors from the Oregon Zoo were recently sent to The Peregrine Fund in Boise, Idaho. Meriwether and Tatoosh will be released in Arizona this summer. The other two Oregon-born condors will be released in the summer of 2008. © Oregon Zoo The past two springs have been successful breeding seasons for condors at the Oregon Zoo, and the zoo hopes this season will be successful as well. "We are just starting the breeding season, but are seeing lots of encouraging behavior so far," says St. Michael. "All of the pairs are showing good breeding behaviors, and we have high hopes for a very productive season."

In 2001, the Oregon Zoo became the third zoo in the nation to join the California Condor Recovery Program. California condor captive-breeding programs are also operated at San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park, the Los Angeles Zoo, and The Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho. The Oregon Zoo was the recipient of The Wildlife Society's Conservation Award for "creating the nation's fourth California condor breeding facility" in April 2005.

The zoo's condor recovery efforts take place at the Jonsson Center for Wildlife Conservation, located in Clackamas County on Metro-owned open space. The remoteness of the facility minimizes the exposure of young condors to people, increasing the chances for captive-hatched birds to survive and breed in the wild.

Condors, the largest land birds in North America, have wingspans of up to 10 feet and weigh 18 to 30 pounds. They are highly intelligent and inquisitive, often engaging in play. Their range extended across much of North America during the Pleistocene Era, which ended about 10,000 years ago. By 1940, that range had been reduced to the coastal mountains of Southern California, and in 1967 condors were added to the first federal list of endangered species. In 1987, the 17 condors remaining in the wild were brought into captivity and a captive-breeding program was developed.

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