

# Eggs-cellent! Oregon Zoo welcomes first condor chicks of 2018

PORTLAND, Ore. — Two pairs of proud California condor parents welcomed new chicks at the Oregon Zoo's Jonsson Center for Wildlife Conservation on March 18, kicking off what looks to be great year for the condor recovery effort.

Since late January, condors at the off-site facility have been laying the groundwork for species recovery one egg at a time. The condors laid nine eggs this year, with seven confirmed to be fertile. Two have hatched and the rest were expected to arrive in the coming weeks.

"Each new egg is critical to the California condor's comeback," said Kelli Walker, the zoo's lead condor keeper.

Among the expecting condor parents this year is No. 348, known as Willie, and his mate No. 155, known as Timocho. The pair has raised chicks together before, including "re-hatched" offspring (originally incubated by other birds).

"Willie loves his chicks," Walker said. "I have never seen a bird get so excited as Willie when he hears a hatching chick. Last year, when Willie and Timocho were down eating and Willie heard the chick, he spun around in a circle on his toes with excitement, flew up to the nest room and settled on it immediately."

Condor parents take turns brooding their chicks, Walker said, and the chicks will stay with their parents for at least eight months before moving to the Jonsson Center's pre-release pens for about a year and a half.

Eventually, they will travel to a wild release site to join free-flying condors in California, Arizona or Baja Mexico. With so few of the birds left in the world, each new chick is vitally important to the species' survival.

The California condor was one of the original animals included on the 1973 Endangered Species Act and is classified as critically endangered. In 1982, only



Courtesy photo from the Oregon Zoo

A nest-cam monitor shows the Oregon Zoo's first California condor chick of 2018, lower left, with new dad No. 540.

22 individuals remained in the wild and by 1987, the last condors were taken into captivity in an attempt to save the species from extinction.

Thanks to breeding programs like the Oregon Zoo's, condor numbers now total around 450, with the majority of those flying free.

Since 2003, 63 chicks have hatched at the Jonsson Center, and 47 Oregon Zoo-reared birds have gone out to field pens for release.

In addition, several eggs laid by Oregon Zoo condors have been placed in wild nests to hatch. The staff hopes the 2018 breeding season will provide another boost to those totals.

Condors are the largest land birds in North America, with wingspans of up to 10 feet and an average weight of 18-25 pounds. They are highly intelligent and

inquisitive, and they require a tremendous amount of parental investment in the wild.

The California condor had a long history in Oregon. Lewis and Clark saw the large birds as they traveled along the Columbia River. Local archaeologists have unearthed 9,000-year-old condor bones from American Indian middens and condors were a common motif for the designs of Oregon's Wasco people, who lived along the Columbia River between The Dalles and Cascade Locks.

Accumulated lead poisoning — a problem that plagues all raptors and scavengers — is the most severe obstacle to the California condor's recovery as a species.

As the birds feed on carrion and other animal carcasses, they can unintentionally ingest lead from bullet fragments. Lead consumption causes paralysis of the digestive tract and results in a slow death

by starvation. Lead also causes severe neurological problems, so the birds not only starve but also suffer from impaired motor functions.

Through its Non-Lead Hunting Education Program, the Oregon Zoo aims to inspire hunters — traditionally some of the strongest supporters of wildlife and habitat conservation — to continue that legacy by choosing non-lead ammunition.

The Oregon Zoo's condor recovery efforts take place at the Jonsson Center for Wildlife Conservation in rural Clackamas County on Metro-owned open land. 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.

California condor breeding programs are also operated at the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park, the Los Angeles Zoo and the Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Idaho. LightHawk, a nonprofit conservation flying organization, also provides support for these condor-recovery efforts.

As part of the Metro family, the Oregon Zoo helps make the Portland area a great place to call home. Committed to conservation, the zoo is currently working to save endangered California condors, Oregon silverspot and Taylor's checkerspot butterflies, western pond turtles and Oregon spotted frogs.

Support from the Oregon Zoo Foundation enhances and expands the zoo's efforts in conservation, education and animal welfare.

The zoo opens at 9:30 a.m. daily and is located five minutes from downtown Portland, just off Highway 26.

The zoo is also accessible by MAX light rail line. Visitors who travel to the zoo via MAX receive \$1.50 off zoo admission. Call TriMet Customer Service, 503-238-RIDE (7433), or visit trimet.org for fare and route information.

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Eugene Area Office: Nicholas Viles, 541-484-4234, 2468 W 11<sup>th</sup> Ave., Eugene, OR 97402

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Editor-in-Chief: Brenda Bremner  
Editor: Diane Rodriguez  
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