

America's
**ANIMAL
COMEBACKS**

California Condors



Saved by Captive Breeding

by Meish Goldish

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California Condors

Saved by Captive Breeding



by Meish Goldish

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The Last Wild Condor

On April 19, 1987, a California condor named AC-9 soared high in the sky. The bird spotted a dead calf on the ground below. He flew down to eat some of the meat. Suddenly, **biologists** hiding nearby fired a net from a big gun, trapping the large bird. The last wild California condor in the world had just been captured.



AC-9 being captured

Scientists use codes to identify California condors. AC-9 stands for Adult Condor Number Nine.



The scientists were filled with hope and excitement. They knew that California condors had been dying out for years. Soon the birds might be **extinct**. Their only chance to save the condors was to capture them and **breed** them in zoos. Then they could try to **release** the **chicks** back into the wild. With AC-9, scientists had finally captured all the wild condors—but there were only 27 in all. Would they be enough to save the **species**?

The California condor is the largest bird in North America.



A Free Life

California condors once enjoyed a life of freedom in North America. Forty thousand years ago, the birds soared over large parts of the west and southwest, including California, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. They fed on prehistoric animals such as giant sloths, ancient bison, and camels.



This painting shows a prehistoric condor trying to eat a dead camel.

About 10,000 years ago, however, the **climate** of the southwest became more desert-like. Most of the animals that the condor ate died out. To find food, condors in the southwest were forced to move farther west, near the Pacific Ocean. The climate there was milder. There were also many animals that the condor could eat. The large black birds were able to feed on whales, sea lions, pronghorn antelope, deer, and elk.



Native Americans who lived near the condors in California and Oregon respected the bird. The condor appears in many of their **myths** and **legends**. Feathers from the bird were also used in their religious ceremonies.

This Native American holds condor feathers during his prayer.

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About the Author

Meish Goldish has written more than 100 books for children. His books *Florida Manatees: Warm Water Miracles* and *Gray Wolves: Return to Yellowstone* were recommended by the National Science Teachers Association in 2008.



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California Condors

Saved by Captive Breeding

On April 19, 1987, a California condor soared high in the sky. As he flew down to eat some meat on the ground, biologists hiding nearby fired a net from a big gun—trapping the last wild California condor in the world. For thousands of years, these giant birds had soared across North America. Yet by 1987, there were only 27 still alive. Could scientists find a way to help bring the California condor back from the brink of extinction?

American Alligators
Freshwater Survivors

American Bison
A Scary Prediction

Bald Eagles
A Chemical Nightmare

Black-footed Ferrets
Back from the Brink

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