

In Search of California Condors! *Summer birding, August 15, 2009*

For the past year **Let's Go Birding** has partnered with other organizations to provide exciting opportunities to take people birding. Every August Let's Go Birding leads an annual condor trip and on this day partnered with the Los Gatos, Wild Bird Center to take a group of 20 outdoor enthusiasts on an adventure of a lifetime! Our goal, to find the California Condors found in the areas around Big Sur. To do this we headed to the coast and encountered tremendous smoke coming off of the Lockheed Fire burning in the Santa Cruz Mountains. It was an ominous reminder of the devastation happening near. Our destination took us away from the fire but we passed fire crew after fire crew as strike teams from all over the state responded to the emergency – Truckee, Tiburon, Berkeley, Oakland, Palos Verde, San Jose, Tahoe.....

Our first stop was at Moss Landing where we could stretch our legs and check out the wildlife found here. Conversations about tern species and gulls was the hot topic, but we also enjoyed three different cormorant species and a pair of Red Throated Loons.

We got to the Big Sur Ornithology Lab in time for lunch. We selected this spot so the group could visit the Discovery Center and learn more about condors and the recovery efforts that have brought this species back from what would have been extinction.

After lunch we continued south to look for any of the 40 California Condors currently living in the area. We soon found our first condor flying overhead. The group jumped out of their cars eager to see this bird which was a first for many! It was in the company of a Turkey Vulture; allowing a great chance to compare both vultures side by side. We continued south stopping a few times along the way adding new species each time. Once past Nepenthes Restaurant we encountered California Condor #35 who flew along side the road (pictured below). We pulled over and found many, many condors flying around the new house built on Grimes Point (this is a favorite condor hot spot). Sure enough, 14 condors were in the trees and area around the house. Tourists stopped to ask us what we were doing and using our spotting scopes we invited them to view the birds up close. We also got to share with everyone about their amazing come back. French, British, German, Latin, young and old.....no matter the age or language barrier, everyone appreciated the experience. The condors were very active and eventually they all took to the air and we watched a flock of condors rising above – it was amazing. We headed home.

California Condor Cool Facts!

- Largest Bird in North America with a 10 foot wing span & weighing 18 – 23 lbs
- They eat only dead things & their crop can hold three pounds of meat
- Condors can travel 150 miles per day reaching speeds of 40 MPH
- Condors never developed vocalization and thus make no noise
- Condors will urinate on themselves to help cool down body temperatures
- Adult condors raise one chick at a time averaging two every three years
- Condors can live 60 to 80 years
- Population has grown from 27 birds in 1987 to 356 birds today.



Condor #35 photographed by trip participant Nate Sanders

To learn more please visit www.ventanaws.org

Species found during our adventure includes heard only (H)
Birds are listed in the taxonomic order currently recognized by the AOU

Canada Goose	Snowy Egret	Heermanns Gull	Steller's Jay
Wild Turkey	Turkey Vulture	Ring Billed Gull	American Crow
Red-Throated Loon	California Condors	Western Gull	Common Raven
Western Grebe	Red-tail Hawk	Pigeon Guillemot	Cliff Swallows
Eared Grebe	Red Shoulder Hawk	Common Murre	Tree Swallows
Double Crested Cormorant	American Kestrel	Rock Pigeon	Barn Swallows
Brandt's Cormorant	Peregrine Falcon	Mourning Dove	Wrentit (h)
Pelagic Cormorant	Willet	Black Swift	Spotted Towhee (h)
Brown Pelican	American Godwit	Nuttall's Woodpecker	California Towhee
American White Pelican	Black Oystercatcher (h)	Hairy Woodpecker (h)	European Starling
Great Blue Heron	Samipalmated Plover	Downy Woodpecker	Brewer's Blackbird
Great Egret	Peeps Flyovers	Western Scrub-Jay	Lesser Goldfinch