



Friends of Canada de los Osos Ecological Reserve

Fall 2023



From The Chair - Henry Coletto

A wet winter and spring provided the Reserve with over 38 inches of rain. Over a dozen stock ponds filled, which along with over 30 springs, provided water for wildlife.

With this year's rainfall, wildlife on the Reserve had what they needed to thrive – food, water, and cover.

One project we are working on this year is securing a contract to put in a solar system at the educational center to replace a propane generator. A second large project is renovating an old redwood barn that was originally used as a hay barn and stable for horses. Funding for this project came from several of our donors, with the labor being done by CDLO volunteers. The barn will be used as part of our interpretive program. We expect both projects to be completed next year.

One last thing to report is that a group of California condors has been using the Reserve. Six birds were seen on trail cameras set up near remains of cleaning a wild pig after our junior hunt. Learn more about the condors in Joe Belli's article on the second page. It's very exciting news to see an endangered species returning to the Mt. Hamilton Range!

As a note – throughout California, as a protection for eagles, condors, vultures, and other critters that feed on carrion, lead bullets are no longer legal for use in game hunting. For all our hunts on the Reserve, we require copper or other non-lead bullets. Another hazard we've noticed is the use of disposable blades in hunting knives. If these are thrown away with a gut pile, they can be lethal for wildlife. So spread the word – think about what you leave in the hills that might prove fatal if eaten by a bird or mammal. Even a pop-top from a can or a disposable glove could be lethal to a curious condor!. And next time you're in the Mt. Hamilton Range – look up! You might see a big bird you've never seen before. Happy Holidays!



We had another successful BBQ in June - thanks to all our supporters!

Wild Turkeys in California

David A. Jessup, Wildlife Veterinarian

Many people do not know that wild turkeys, like pheasant, chukar and bobwhite quail, are not native to California. Game laws do not allow the buying and selling of hunted species. So, in the 1970's and early 80's, to advance game bird hunting opportunities, and with the approval of the Fish and Game Commission, California Department of Fish and Game (now Fish and Wildlife), traded pheasant (of which we had plenty) for wild turkeys. They came primarily from Texas, although some birds also came from Colorado and other Western States.

Wild turkey will eat almost anything, and given the opportunity, even kill small animals for food. Like many species (wild pigs are another example) that thrive on Fall mast crops (acorns, berries and bulbs); they have done very well in the foothills of California. One of the earliest and most productive places for wild turkeys was on the lands that became Canada de los Osos (CDLO) Ecological Reserve. At some times of the year flocks of around 100 or more can be seen in the valley floor. For nearly a decade surplus wild turkeys were trapped off of CDLO and moved to other locations to help populate other areas of the State.

This has not been without controversy. In the 1980's it became clear that some wild turkey populations in Colorado that were sources for birds going to California were infected with *Mycoplasma* bacteria that can be detrimental to wild populations and domestic poultry. This was one reason to switch from relocating out of state birds to relocating CDLO birds that had been tested and shown clear of those diseases. Since they are non-native and may compete with some native species, the overall wisdom of introducing them was brought up by some conservation groups, but by then they were well established. Also, wild turkeys may demonstrate it is possible to have 'too much of a good thing'. They generally reproduce very successfully, particularly in areas with few predators, and can become fairly tame, and with their scratching and scraping of the ground, are seen as a 'pest' by people who have managed landscapes in suburban areas.

CDLO hosts Spring and Fall youth wild turkey hunts that are often quite successful. The body condition of all birds taken (which is usually excellent) are examined by CDLO staff and the occasional diseased bird may be sent in for pathological analysis. Wild turkeys and their poults also serve as an excellent food source for bobcat, mountain lion, coyote, fox, large raptors and other predators on CDLO and adjacent lands. Most Californians appreciate having such a large, colorful and interesting bird to watch, as well as the opportunity to watch them interact as they forage and 'talk' to one another. Some people, using turkey calls, even 'talk back'. Next time you are at CDLO try to count how many wild turkeys you see on the property.



Condors at CDLO - Joe Belli

California condors, among the largest and rarest birds in North America, have been spotted on the reserve recently. With wingspans exceeding nine feet, condors were a common sight in the area at the time of the Gold Rush but vanished from the region prior to 1900. Their dwindling population eventually led to an endangered species listing, and after their numbers plummeted to less than two dozen in the 1980s, a captive breeding program was established and the entire wild population was taken into captivity.

Once their numbers stabilized and increased, reintroductions began. In 1997, the Ventana Wildlife Society started releasing condors in Big Sur, and in 2003, Pinnacles National Park became the second release site in the region. The Central California flock now numbers 90 birds.

Every condor has vinyl wing tags with an ID number, as well as a transmitter emitting radio signals. Many also wear GPS transmitters, which allow us to see how far they travel and where they spend their time. Condors are tracked on a daily basis.

Condors are highly social, intelligent, and curious birds. They don't hunt prey, but rather scavenge for carrion, feeding on creatures ranging in size from ground squirrels to beached whales. The open ridges of the reserve are excellent foraging habitat, where condors can spot the carcasses of deer, wild pigs, and cattle on the neighboring ranches.

Although condors have explored Santa Clara County as far back as 2004, they rarely ventured north of Hollister until recently. This year has seen a dramatic increase in usage of the Pacheco Pass area, and over 20 condors have been recorded on the reserve. As the population grows it is likely to expand its range. Condors have nested successfully in Pinnacles for a number of years, and condors hatched in captivity are released every year at Pinnacles and Big Sur.

Unfortunately, condors are not prolific; pairs produce one chick at a time, and typically breed every two years. Growing the population with such a low reproductive rate is a challenge— every condor is important. Condors have few predators; they're more threatened by disease outbreaks and power line collisions, but the greatest threat is lead poisoning, which they contract by feeding on the remains of animals shot with lead bullets. You can do your part to restore this amazing species by hunting with non-lead ammunition. In the meantime, keep your eyes to the skies while enjoying the reserve—you never know what you might see!

