| A New Baby for the Condors |
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| **Article**  Lexile 810  **PAGE 1**  image  Photo credit: AP  *In 2010, one of the mating pairs of condors at Pinnacles National Monument in California produced an egg.*  **FRESNO, California** (Achieve3000, March 24, 2010). Biologists at Pinnacles National Monument, a national park in central California, are celebrating. In 2010, for the first time in more than a century, one of the park's mating pairs of condors produced an egg. This is great news for condors. The bird species is endangered. Not long ago, it was close to extinction.  With its 10 foot wingspan, the condor is the largest flying bird in North America. It lives mostly in mountainous and forested areas that have hot, dry summers and cool, damp winters. The condor eats carrion. These huge birds locate their food by soaring for long distances. Their excellent eyesight allows them to see the ground below.  One thing threatens the condor species more than anything else: hunting. In some cases, the birds themselves are hunted. In other cases, the birds feed on carrion from deer and other mammals. These animals have been shot with lead bullets. When condors eat meat that contains these bullets, they can die from lead poisoning.  These threats came about less than 200 years ago. But they nearly destroyed the condor population. Originally, the species' range was large. It extended up and down the West Coast of North America, from northern Mexico to British Columbia (in western Canada). By 1937, the population had been limited to California. By 1982, there were only 22 California condors left. Today, the condor is one of the most endangered birds in the world.  In the late 1980s, scientists captured the last of the wild condors to try to save the species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) began breeding the captive condors. At first, the scientists kept the condors close by. They wanted to be sure that new generations were being born. But in 1992, they began releasing condors in parts of California and Arizona. They followed each one closely and watched as the birds formed mating pairs.  Today, there are 348 condors in the world. About 180 of them fly free at three locations in California and at the Grand Canyon in Arizona. Another dozen are in Baja California. The goal is to have 450 condors in three different populations. Scientists hope to have 15 breeding pairs in each group.  The egg at Pinnacles was produced by a female condor that was released in 2004. Early in 2010, scientists observed the female spending time with a male condor. It had been released in 2004, 30 miles to the west.  "They are now the proud parents of a small egg," said park spokesperson Carl Brenner.  Shortly after spotting the egg, biologists began an effort to keep it safe. First, they put a wooden egg in place of the real egg. Fifty-seven days later, they replaced the wooden egg with a condor egg. This was shortly before the egg was due to hatch. But this egg had been produced by captive condors. It was protected by humans in a warming box. The egg that was laid in the wild was protected as well. That egg remained with humans until it hatched. This method is quite common. It makes sure that both eggs are raised in a protected environment. It also makes sure that there will be an offspring for the pair of condors at Pinnacles to raise.  "They are first-time parents, and we don't want them to get discouraged," Brenner explained.  Scientists' efforts to protect the condors seem to be paying off. Seventy-seven condor eggs have been laid in the wild since 2001. Of these, 33 produced birds that lived at least six months—long enough to fly.  "That's close to 50 percent, [about the same as] any species in the wild," said Michael Woodbridge. He is a spokesperson for the Fish and Wildlife Service.  Biologists will keep an eye on all the condors, including the new parents and their chick. That chick could be key to the future of the condor population.  *The Associated Press contributed to this story*.   |  | | --- | | [http://portal.achieve3000.com/images/uploads/whoknew_icon.gif](javascript:void(0);) | | [Click here!](javascript:void(0);) |     **PAGE 2**  Dig Deeper  It's exciting when baby condors are born in the wild. But some chicks still hatch in zoos. There, humans take care of them. This is just for a little while, though. Zookeepers want to let the baby chicks go as soon as they can. Then the chicks will grow up in the wild.  To survive in the wild, it's important that baby condors don't get used to humans. So caregivers have a special way to feed them: They trick the baby birds by putting a condor-shaped puppet on their hand. They feed the baby birds with the puppet. Babies raised this way have a better chance to survive in the wild.    **Dictionary**   |  | | --- | | **biologist** *(noun)*    a scientist who studies living things | | **carrion** *(noun)*    dead animals | | **discourage** *(verb)*    to lose hope | | **endangered** *(adjective)*    in danger of dying out | | **monument** *(noun)*    a famous place or building | |