

## ANDEAN CONDOR CONSERVATION PROGRAM

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For thousands of years, the Andean Condor (*Vultur gryphus*), the largest flight bird in the world, has been honored by indigenous communities in South America who consider it a sacred link between space and men. Once abundant, this emblematic animal, a symbolic link to our past, has been converted, unfortunately, into a conservation challenge. The condors' range has shrunk rapidly in the last hundred years and it was even pronounced extinct in Venezuela in 1965. The Condor is classified as CITES I, is listed as in Danger of Extinction by the USFWS, in addition to being on the IUCN's red list and characterized as Vulnerable by the Secretary of the Environment and Sustainable Development in Argentina.

For this reason, in 1991, the Andean Condor Conservation Program (PCCA) was founded in Argentina. The PCCA started by performing genetic studies and documenting the captive condor population in a Latin American Studbook (248 specimens registered) under a cooperative management program.

The PCCA developed artificial incubation programs and techniques for raising the birds in isolation from human contact and worked to rescue and rehabilitate wild condors.

In relation to the breeding program, 63 chicks have hatched, four (6%) of which did not survive the first few months of life. Of the remaining 59 (94%), two were transferred to ex situ conservation programs, two were born in 2016 and are being bred to be released during 2017 and 55 were reintroduced in South America.

On the other hand, the PCCA's Rescue and Rehabilitation Center (CRCA) receives condors that have been victims of hunters, injured in traps or poisoned by the illegal use of toxic baits, or that have collided with high-tension wires or fallen into the hands of illegal traffickers. The CRCA, located at the Ecoparque Buenos Aires, works to facilitate the rescue and rehabilitation of wild condors with the aim of releasing them back into their natural environment or integrating them into ex situ conservation plans. The PCCA took part in the rescue of 199 condors.

From the breeding and rescue programs, the PCCA has reintroduced 164 condors, 96 individuals with flight experience and 68 condors without flight experience. Within the framework of the Binational Program, the PCCA has succeeded in releasing 28 of those condors in Chile. The PCCA has also participated in the reintroduction of 3 in Colombia, 6 in Venezuela, 3 in Bolivia and 124 in Argentina, resulting in a total number of 164 Andean condors reintroduced in South America.

Post-release tracking and population studies are carried out by the PCCA. The PCCA uses various systems of identification and tracking, including the application of microchips, the use of vinyl wing bands, and radio and satellite transmission. The use and application of these devices makes it possible not only to monitor the movement of the birds across enormous and isolated areas, such as the Andes Mountains, but also enables a better understanding about how the birds use their environment.

While breeding and rescue program are a powerful tool, education is key to producing a cultural shift in society. The PCCA carries out programs of education with schools, residents and farmers in rural communities, as well as those in big cities, reaching thousands of students and members of the community. To add to this, the PCCA has published numerous brochures, educational booklets, books, videos, documentaries and educational materials, which are distributed to educational institutions and local communities.