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## ***Andean Condor Fact Sheet (5/1/94)***

### **Andean Condor** (*Vultur gryphus*)

**Description:** The Andean condor is the largest bird of prey and the largest flying bird in the world. It has shining black plumage, a wing span of ten to twelve feet, and weighs between 18 and 33 pounds. It is marked by white bands on the dorsal portion of its wings and a white neck ruff. Like many vultures, its head is naked of feathers; it has a strong beak for ripping and relatively weak feet. The male is larger than the female by up to ten pounds and has a large comb on its head.

**Range:** Condors live along the Andes mountain range of South America, from Colombia south to Tierra del Fuego.

**Habitat:** Andean condors prefer to ride the thermal and deflected air currents of the mountains from sea level up to 16,000 feet in altitude. They nest on cliffs or ledges with sandy substrate.

**Diet:** Andean condors almost exclusively feed on carrion. Along the coast they live off dead fish, whales and seals and may take the eggs and young of shore birds. Inland, they live off large mammal corpses. They are believed to occasionally kill animals as large as a kid goat.

**Social Organization:** The condor lives in flocks that disperse in the breeding season. The female lays a single large egg. It takes eight months for the young to be independent of its parents, depending on the abundance of local food resources.

Consen breeding these large birds; a studbook was recently completed. Over 75% of Andean condors in zoos were hatched in captivity.

**Conservation:** Field studies of Andean condors in Ecuador are planned in the next few years by the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology.

**Reintroduction:** Fourteen male captive-bred Andean condors have been released in Colombia. However, 13 female Andean condors were also released in California beginning 1989 in Los Padres National Forest as a test project for California condors. Researchers are hoping the Andean condors can be trained to forage in restricted protected areas and be used as a model for training the California species, which exists only in captivity. After the two-year test, the female Andean condors will be

captured and re-released in Colombia, South America, in their native habitat.

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