

Northern California Condor Dies in Wild

March 28, 2025



Pathology Report Identifies Lead Poisoning as Cause of Death

In January, Northern California Condor Restoration Program (NCCRP) condor B7, Pey-noh-pey-o-wok (I am friend or kind or good-natured) was found dead in the remote backcountry of Redwood National Park. His passing marks the first loss of a condor from the Northern California population under the NCCRP. At roughly 18 months of age, he was the youngest condor in the flock and had been in the wild for just over three months.

The NCCRP delayed a formal announcement until the official cause of death was determined. The results from a pathology examination indicate the cause of death to be lead poisoning. Pey-noh-pey-o-wok was found to have a lead air gun pellet in his ventricular, or gizzard, and high to very high concentrations of lead in his liver and bone. The source of the pellet is unknown.

“The loss of Pey-noh-pey-o-wok was a huge blow to us,” said Program Manager and Yurok Tribe Senior Biologist Chris West. “Thankfully, we have 17 other amazing birds in our flock carrying our hopes, dreams

and prayers”

“A natural death would have been left painful for us, the humans watching as he started to flourish in the wild. Pey-noh-pey-o-wok was known for his friendliness, preening and huddling together with other condors, sharing food easily. He’d only been flying free for a few months. That he was brought down by something human-caused and preventable is devastating,” said Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department Director Tiana Williams- Claussen.

Lead is the single biggest threat to condors in the wild and is responsible for nearly half of released condor mortalities where the cause of death is determined. The effort to bring awareness and urging manufacturers to switch to lead-free ammunition is well underway.

Pey-noh-pey-o-wok was one of 18 free-flying condors released by NCCRP since the program’s inception in 2022. The next condor release is scheduled later this year.

The California Condor Recovery Program is a multi-entity effort led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service