

The Mountain Chickadee

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Photograph by Tom Taylor

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Say's Phoebe - Photo by Rachel McGrew

The Sangre de Cristo Audubon chapter represents a landscape that has been occupied for millennia by peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds. We honor that diversity and believe that just as we strive to protect biodiversity, we must include and respect the diversity of the many people and cultures that call northern New Mexico their home.

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Bringing Prey-go-neesh Home

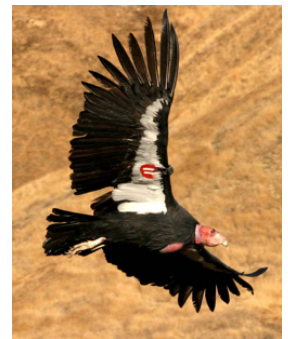
(Editor's Note: This article by Tiana Williams-Claussen, director of the Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department, first appeared in Living Bird magazine. It has been edited for length.)

I'd like to share a story of near destruction, survival, perseverance and ultimately healing and restoration. This is my story; a story of my people, the Yurok Tribe of Northern California; the story of the California Condor; and how we intertwine.

As Yurok people, we care for the whole world and strive to keep it healthy and well. We care for not only humans and other living beings, but for the earth itself, its soil, air, and waters, and the spirit that imbues them. In turn, the world cares for us, in balance. Since long before non-indigenous exploration and settlement in our area, the Yurok people have lived in the northwest corner of what is now California, with villages stretching along the lower portion of the Klamath River and extending along the Pacific coastline to the north and south. Yurok lands were once home to a trackless expanse of old-growth redwoods, pristine rivers passing through mountainous terrain, and extensive prairie systems maintained through traditional fire. Our world supported an incredible diversity of species, including immeasurable salmon runs; abundant elk, deer, mountain lion and bear; and the magnificent Prey-go-neesh (California Condor).

Tragically, our world was almost torn apart post-American contact. A surge of new people arrived, overharvesting wildlife for food and profit, razing old-growth redwoods, scarring the land, diverting and draining the water, and laying waste to the carefully balanced ecosystem of which we were a part. Some of the largest massacres in American history occurred locally, and stories told of the atrocities reverberate throughout our community still today.

One casualty of the upheaval was the Prey-go-neesh - the largest land-based bird in North America, with a wingspan of more than nine feet. Prey-go-neesh is of deep cultural importance to many tribes throughout California and the Pacific Northwest. Many families, my own included, taught that the condor was a sacred creature, not to be harmed. Prey-go-neesh was amongst the first spirits of the world, and helped teach us how to live in a good way. Any condor feathers that we received, which we use in our regalia and which carry the spirit of Prey-go-neesh, were considered gifts. The last documented condor in our region was killed at the turn of the 20th century, and the loss was devastating to us.



California Condor/USFWS

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In Birding and Baseball, Hope Springs Eternal

The Ivory-billed Woodpecker was officially declared extinct last year by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. But is it? A team of researchers recently claimed the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is still alive and pecking in the forests of Louisiana. A series of grainy pictures and observations of the bird, which had its last widely accepted sighting in 1944, show that the scrupulously furtive woodpecker is still holding on in the swampy forests of the South, according to the team, whose research is yet to be peer-reviewed.

A three-year quest to find the woodpecker involved scientists trudging through an undisclosed portion of Louisiana woodland to observe the bird and take audio recordings. Unmanned trail cameras, set up to take pictures on a time lapse, and a drone were used to capture photos of the woodpecker. Steve Latta, the director of conservation at the National Aviary in Pittsburgh, who led the effort, said each member of the team had encounters with the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and often heard its call, which has been described as a child puffing into a tin trumpet.

Latta himself saw the bird fly upwards in front of him, showing distinctive white edges to its wings. "It flew up at an angle and I watched it for about six to eight seconds, which was fairly long for an Ivory-billed Woodpecker," he said. "I was visibly shaking afterwards." The size and the markings of the bird captured in the photos is strong evidence that it is not another woodpecker, such as a Pileated or Red-headed Woodpecker, Latta said.

Ivory-billed Woodpeckers were once relatively common, stretching from the Carolinas through the southeastern U.S. to Texas. They were, or are, the largest woodpeckers in the country, with the males sporting a distinctive red crest

on their heads. Their numbers started to drop sharply in the 19th century due to human interference with their habitat and overhunting. With only a few of the birds left in largely inaccessible forests, confirmed sightings, let alone clear pictures, became almost impossible.



Ivory-billed Woodpecker/Painting by Louis Agassiz Fuytes

"No one has held a camera and got a picture of one in years because it's a scarce bird in tough swampy habitat, and they don't want people close to them because they've been shot at for 150 years," said Geoffrey Hill, a biologist at Auburn University who took part in a largely frustrating trip to find the bird in Florida in 2005. "They have better eyes than we do, they are high in the trees and actively flee people. They aren't great thinkers but they have developed a pretty simple strategy to avoid people."

Hill said Latta's research was "very interesting" and that he thought it likely that the bird pictured in the team's photos is indeed an Ivory-billed Woodpecker. He added that the USFWS was premature to decide the species was extinct and that several dozen could still be holding on in forests across the South.

The Guardian

Sangre de Cristo Chapter Activities

Field Trip

La Cieneguilla Petroglyphs Saturday, June 4 - 8:30 am

Leader: Andrew Black - andrew@fpcsantafe.org

This moderate and interactive hike is located just outside the city of Santa Fe and will explore ancient Native American petroglyphs and Spanish sacred sites as well as delve into the rich cultural history of the Camino Real and Route 66. The proposed Caja del Rio Wildlife and Cultural Interpretive Management Area is one of the most ecologically rich habitats in North America and is also of profound cultural and historical significance. It is home to herds of mule deer and elk and a variety of unique and sensitive plant and animal species, including black bear, cougar, Western Burrowing Owl and Golden Eagle. The area has also been designated as an Important Bird Area with a river corridor critical for waterfowl and non-game species migration. There are over 4,400 petroglyphs

in less than a mile with 1/3 of these being birds. This field trip will be a great way to get outdoors and learn about how you can help us advocate to protect this important cultural, wildlife and birding area.

We will meet at 8:30 am on June 4 at the BLM La Cieneguilla Petroglyphs parking lot off Highway 56, 3.3 miles past the Santa Fe airport toward La Cienega.



Get the latest news about upcoming field trips, and receive advance notifications and instructions for our Zoom programs, by signing up for our [email list](#).

Audubon Southwest

Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary

Trails, restrooms and gardens at the [Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary](#) are open Monday to Saturday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. The visitor's center is generally open from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. We are closed Sundays and in January. Watch birds visit our bird feeders, or walk the trails and enjoy the beauty and serenity of the 135-acre wildlife sanctuary. Free bird walks are conducted every Saturday at 8:30 am, except in January and on holiday weekends. The Center is located at 1800 Upper Canyon Road, Santa Fe.



Historic House Tours

Step back in time as you stroll through the old Santa Fe style home of the artist Randall Davey (1887-1964). This docent-led tour will give you an opportunity to view some of Davey's most spectacular works of art, as well as a beautiful collection of Spanish Colonial and European antiques. Tours are held every Friday at 2:00 p.m., with masks required. Cost is \$5 per person. Please reserve your spot by calling 505-983-4609 X28, or click [here](#) for more details. Thank you and stay healthy!

Hoist One for the Pinyon Jay

The Pinyon Jay is an iconic bird of the intermountain west, but sadly it is a bird at risk. As the west becomes increasingly hot and arid, Pinyon-Juniper woodlands are suffering and without its favorite food, Pinyon Pine nuts, the jay is struggling to hold on.

To help build a community of folks willing to take action on its behalf, Audubon Southwest, Sangre de Cristo Audubon and Bosque Brewing Company are teaming up to launch a collaborative beer: "Oh Hey, Pinyon Jay!" Flavored with pinyon tips, prickly pear and local honey, cans of this brew will sport an image of the jay and a link to sign up for the growing Pinyon Jay community science program. With the help of the community, we can get a snapshot of the bird's status over a large geographic range and gather data we need to inform conservation efforts.



The new brew's label

"Oh Hey, Pinyon Jay" will be released Saturday, July 16 during a launch event at Bosque Brewing Company's Santa Fe location, Restoration Pizza, and will be available at all Bosque Brewing Company locations and at local retailers while supplies last. Learn more about Pinyon Jays [here](#).

The Nature of Education

As they head up a trail at the Randall Davey Audubon Center and Sanctuary, the second graders from Santa Fe's Ramirez Thomas Elementary School can barely contain their energy and excitement. "Look at the bird!" shouts one. "Oh look - another one!" says a second.

The field trip is part of Audubon Southwest's work to foster an awareness and appreciation of nature in a young audience. The multi-pronged effort takes place in Arizona as well as New Mexico, but at Randall Davey the focus is on kids from Santa Fe. There are summer camps – nearly sold out at this year – in which 16 kids aged 5-12 come to the center every day for a week to experience the joy of being outside. There are also guided hikes, workshops and other activities throughout the year for families and the public in general. But the greatest amount of time is spent working with local schools through a combination of classroom visits and field trips. Up to 2,000 students participate every year.

Many of the students come from Title 1 schools on the south side of Santa Fe (including Ramirez Thomas),



A student peers at pollen through a microscope during a field trip at Randall Davey Audubon Center

which serve large numbers of students from low-income backgrounds. For these schools, Audubon Southwest waives its program fee and covers the cost of renting buses to bring students to the center. The majority of the field trips are for fourth graders since the outdoors experience at Randall Davey dovetails with the Santa Fe School District's life-sciences curriculum for students at that level.

Still, all this came to a screeching halt during the pandemic, when field trips and classroom visits were canceled for months on end, right? Wrong. Education specialist Sally Maxwell tackled the challenge of covid with aplomb, adapting to virtual learning and creating written materials that students used on self-guided activities in their neighborhoods. That was followed by virtual field trips: "I would do a presentation in their virtual classrooms, and then the students would go outside to observe and investigate," Maxwell said. For her unflagging efforts, National Audubon presented Maxwell with the 2021 Tamar Chotzen Educator of the Year Award. Maxwell recently left her position with Audubon Southwest, but director of community education Katie Weeks said a search for a replacement is under way.

Researchers have found that nature education in childhood can create a connection with nature that is a strong predictor of pro-environmental attitudes and

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Environment

War and Wildlife

The Black Sea Biosphere Reserve, on the southern coast of Ukraine, is a haven for more than 120,000 migrating birds that spend the winter flitting about its shores. A multicolored spectrum of rare species - the White-tailed Eagle, Red-breasted Merganser and Black-winged Stilt, to name just a few - nest among its protected waters and wetlands. The reserve is also home to the endangered sandy blind mole rat, the Black Sea bottlenose dolphin, rare flowers - and, in recent weeks, an invading military.



White-tailed Eagle
Photo by Patrick Holian/
Earth Island Institute

With the reserve currently occupied by Russian troops, "there is no information on environmental losses," a Ukrainian official said recently. But military activity there sparked fires large enough to be seen from space, prompting concerns about the status of critical bird-breeding habitats. "We are shocked and horrified for the

human cost of what's happening in Ukraine first and foremost, but also what's happening to the environment there," said Thor Hanson, an independent conservation biologist and expert on how wars affect the environment.

Research on previous armed conflicts suggests that the ecological impact of the conflict could be profound. Wars destroy habitats, kill wildlife, generate pollution and remake ecosystems entirely, with consequences that ripple for decades - with some exceptions. Wars can make landscapes so dangerous, inhospitable to humans or difficult to exploit that ecosystems sometimes have a rare opportunity to recover. Nevertheless, studies suggest that war disproportionately affects the planet's most important ecosystems. From 1950 to 2000, more than 80% of the world's major armed conflicts took place in biodiversity hotspots that are particularly rich in diversity of species, Dr. Hanson and his colleagues found in a 2009 study.

Even when environmental destruction is not deliberate, war can cause deep damage. Soldiers dig trenches, tanks flatten vegetation, bombs scar landscapes and explosives ignite fires. Weapons spew toxic gases and particulates into the air and leak heavy metals into soil and water. In 2011, scientists reported that levels of lead and copper were still elevated in the soil in certain areas around Ypres, a major World War I battlefield in Belgium.

Environmental pollution is an especially acute concern in Ukraine, a country replete with chemical plants and storage facilities, oil depots, coal mines, gas lines and other industrial sites, which could release enormous amounts of pollution if damaged. Some have already been hit. "This could really be compared to using chemical weapons," said Oleksii Vasyliuk, a biologist and co-founder of the [Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group](#). Vasyliuk is also concerned about the environmental consequences of a

recent decision by his own government to cancel the so-called "silence season" - a prohibition on timber cutting in protected areas and other forests during the critical spring animal-breeding season - under the pretext of supporting the country's defense. The UNCG has been raising money for nature reserves to provide food, water and medicine to workers in occupied areas, and help displaced workers find housing, he said.

New York Times

Starling Scourge Not Shakespearean

Researchers have debunked a long-repeated yarn that the European Starling, often considered a scourge in North America, owes its beginnings in this country to a 19th-century lover of Shakespeare. This much is true: the European Starling, an introduced species, has become one of the most plentiful birds in North America, with a population of about 85 million. They are considered pests, spreading disease to livestock and causing \$800 million worth of agricultural damage each year. The species also is believed to take over the nesting cavities of native birds, leading to population declines.

Nevertheless, John MacNeill Miller, an assistant professor of English at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, and Lauren Fugate,



European Starlings/Photo by Rachel Wood

a student who worked with him, recently conducted an exhaustive study and concluded that while 40 pairs of European Starlings were released twice in New York City in 1890 and 1891 by Eugene Schieffelin, the notion that Schieffelin was enthralled by birds mentioned by Shakespeare has no basis in fact. Dr. Miller and Ms. Fugate also question whether today's birds are uniquely descended from Schieffelin's flocks, as has often been repeated in magazines, newspapers and on birding websites. Numerous records exist of earlier European Starling introductions, starting in 1872, to locations including New York City, Ohio and even Oregon. Such releases were part of an "acclimatization" movement at the time where people deliberately transplanted species into new areas, either to see how they would adapt or because they were seen as beneficial.

Wild starlings were caught in Massachusetts in 1876, far from any of the documented introductions. Likewise, there is a record of wild starlings in New Jersey in 1884. "Most invasions come from multiple introductions," said Natalie Hofmeister, a doctoral candidate at Cornell University. The denouement? The introduction of starlings in the U.S. may, perchance, be a tragedy, but not one inspired by the Bard.

New York Times

Climate Crisis

New Mexico Adopts Nation-Leading Air Pollution Rules for Oil and Gas Operators

Conservation, public health and community leaders from across New Mexico applauded the state Environmental Improvement Board's recent preliminary approval of final ozone precursor regulations for oil and gas production and processing. The new rules include nation-leading safeguards that address equipment leaks and malfunctions that account for 70% of the industry's methane emissions.

This marks the second, complementary set of requirements in the Lujan Grisham administration's groundbreaking approach to reduce air and methane pollution from the oil and gas industry. Combined with the ban on routine venting and flaring finalized by the state Oil Conservation Commission in March 2021, these rules hold oil and gas operators accountable for their pollution, limit waste, protect public health and combat climate change.

Methane, one of the key drivers of climate change, is a powerful greenhouse gas 84 times more potent than carbon dioxide in the short term. The newly adopted oil and gas air-pollution rules require oil and gas operators to inspect all wells for leaks on a frequent basis without exemptions, and protect those living closest to development by requiring more frequent inspections to find and fix leaks in proximity to homes and schools. The EIB rules include key improvements supported by public health advocates, local communities and even OXY USA Inc., the state's second-largest oil producer.

And they are timely: A new analysis released by Earthworks shows 144,377 New Mexicans, including 38,749 children, reside near or attend schools or daycares within a half-mile threat-radius of active oil and gas operations. This analysis comes as the U.S. EPA works to finalize its widely supported proposed safeguards to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and associated toxic air pollution from new and existing oil and gas facilities, and as the agency prepares to introduce a supplemental rule to address routine flaring and smaller leak-prone wells. New Mexico's methane and ozone precursor rules set a strong floor for these federal rules that would protect all communities.

Sierra Club

Bird Losses Hinder Plants' Adaptability

More than half the plant species on Earth rely on animals to disperse their seeds. But new research published in the journal *Science* warns that a vital thread of many ecosystems is fraying, with the loss of birds and mammals inhibiting the ability of plants to shift their ranges and adapt to climate change. The study shows the ability of animal-dispersed plants to keep pace with climate change has been reduced by 60% due to the loss of mammals and birds. Lead author and Rice University ecologist Evan Fricke says

that in general, plant communities are attempting to shift to higher latitudes or elevations to adapt to a warming climate, as well as shifting ranges in response to changing precipitation. "If there are no animals available to eat their fruits or carry away their nuts, animal-dispersed plants aren't moving very far," he says.



Blue Jay - Photo by Mason Maron/Macaulay Library

The study showed seed-dispersal losses were especially severe in temperate regions across the globe, including North America - where other research has documented the loss of 3 billion birds since 1970. About one in four Blue Jays have been lost in North America, for example. Blue Jays are key for dispersing seeds of oak and pine trees.

"The study is a vivid illustration of the interconnectedness of living systems, and how the decline of one species can have impacts that ripple across an entire ecosystem in ways we would never have imagined," says Ian Owens, director of the Cornell Lab. "It's this effect that people are referring to when they talk about the risk of 'ecological collapse.'"

American Bird Conservancy

Monarchs Still Facing Extinction

A recently completed yearly count of monarch butterflies that overwintered in Mexico shows this migratory butterfly is still in peril. This year's count of seven acres of occupied winter habitat is up slightly from last year but still below the 14.83-acre threshold scientists say is necessary for the iconic pollinator to be out of the extinction danger zone in North America.

Monarchs are currently on the candidate waiting list for Endangered Species Act protection. They are threatened by climate change, pesticides and illegal logging of the forests where they migrate for the winter. Overall, eastern monarchs - butterflies east of the Rocky Mountains, which account for roughly 99% of all North American monarchs - have declined by around 85% since the mid-1990s. These pollinators migrate each winter from the northern United States and southern Canada to mountaintop oyamel fir forests in central Mexico, and are counted there by Mexico's Commission for National Protected Areas and WWF Mexico.

Monarch butterflies west of the Rocky Mountains overwinter on the central coast of California. Their numbers rebounded this year to more than 200,000 butterflies after nearing total collapse the previous winter, but their population is still down more than 95% since the 1980s.

Center for Biological Diversity

Let Your Representatives in Washington
Know How You Feel!
See Contact Info on Page 8

Wind Energy Co. Pays for Eagle Deaths

A green energy company has been found responsible for killing at least 150 eagles, including bald and golden eagles, at wind-energy facilities in Wyoming and New Mexico. ESI Energy Inc. was sentenced recently for violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in a case that highlights the unintended consequences of relying on wind to generate electricity.

Ironically, the company's crime was not killing the endangered birds, but doing so without having the proper permits. "This whole episode illustrates that the wind industry is a major killer of birds - including bald eagles and golden eagles - but the government lets it happen as long as they've filled out the paperwork and gotten the permit to do so," said Myron Ebell, director of the Center for Energy and the Environment at the Competitive Enterprise Institute in Washington.

ESI pleaded guilty to three counts of violating the MBTA, each based on the documented deaths of golden eagles due to blunt force trauma from being struck by wind turbine blades. The company was sentenced to a fine of \$1,861,600, restitution in the amount of \$6,210,991, and a five-year period of probation during which it must follow an Eagle Management Plan.



Golden Eagle/USFWS

Rebecca Kujawa, president of ESI's parent company, complained that the Department of Justice chose to "criminalize unavoidable accidents related to collisions of birds into wind turbines" while at the same time failing to address other activities that result in far greater numbers of accidental eagle and other bird mortalities. "We have a long-standing and well-earned reputation for protecting our environment and positively co-existing with...wildlife around our facilities," she added. But Joel Merriman of the American Bird Conservancy said it appears that in this instance there were multiple violations over many years. "So, it does make sense that this would be an instance where there would be an enforcement action," he said.

American Bird Conservancy

Border Wall Funding Strategy Ended

Federal agencies and several environmental groups have reached an agreement that prohibits military spending on border walls. The agreement also calls for funding to

restore the borderlands, a study to assess the wall's damage to wildlife habitat, and public participation in ongoing federal efforts to repair harms from former President Donald Trump's border wall.

The agreement settles the conservation groups' 2019 lawsuit challenging Trump's emergency declaration that sidestepped Congress and funneled millions of dollars in Defense Department funding to border-wall construction. The wall has blocked critical wildlife corridors for jaguars and Mexican gray wolves, among other species, along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"While no military funds should've been wasted on Trump's destructive wall, this agreement at least puts a stop to it," said Brian Segee, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. "The wall and its infrastructure, including lights and roads, have carved a monstrous scar across one of the most biodiverse regions on the continent. Now federal agencies will have to take stock of the damage and begin the important work of trying to heal this environmental and humanitarian disaster."

Center for Biological Diversity

Mexican Gray Wolves: Meager Gains

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service confirmed recently that it will eliminate its current population cap of 325 Mexican gray wolves allowed to live in the wild in the Southwest. The new rule temporarily curtails some federal, state and private wolf-killing. The wild population of Mexican gray wolves saw a small increase this past year, to a minimum of 196 wolves, but this growth comes amid revelations of high mortality, low pup survival and a deepening genetic crisis that threatens the wild population.

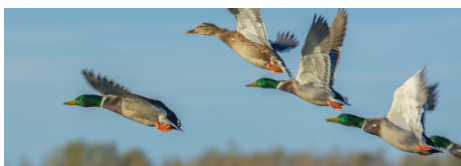
Disappointingly, the USFWS's new rule rejected science-based reforms that would increase genetic diversity at a faster rate. The agency won't resume releasing well-bonded male-female pairs with pups from captivity, and instead will continue removing neonatal pups from captive parents and placing them with unrelated wild wolves. Only 13 of 72 cross-fostered pups released so far are known to be alive, and since 2016, inbreeding in the population has increased by 3%. The agency "continues to flout science and bow to political pressure," said Chris Smith of WildEarth Guardians.

Some of that pressure came recently in letters to the USFWS from two New Mexico elected officials, who demanded the removal of a genetically important family of Mexican gray wolves in retaliation for a handful of lost livestock. State Representative Rebecca Dow, a Republican candidate for governor, asked that a constituent be given a permit to kill wolves on account of two reported depredations. U.S. Rep. Yvette Herrell called upon the agency to kill the entire pack. Their demands are based on the deaths of four livestock, though it's unclear whether the wolves were actually responsible for the cattle deaths.

Avian Bird Flu Outbreak

A strain of bird flu known as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has spread to wild birds in more than 30 U.S. states and every Canadian province. Waterfowl, raptors and vultures seem particularly susceptible. As of May 26, no cases had been reported in New Mexico, but the disease has been detected in wild birds and commercial poultry in the neighboring states of Colorado, Kansas and Oklahoma. More than 750 wild birds representing more than 40 species - including Snow Geese, Bald Eagles and Snowy Owls - have been impacted.

This year's outbreak is more effective at infecting and killing wild birds than the last outbreak in 2014 and 2015. The USDA's Animal and



Wild Ducks/USDA

Plant Health Inspection Service is currently keeping track of [where outbreaks in wild birds are occurring](#) across the U.S. (Note: there is a very low risk of infection in humans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.) If there is an outbreak in your area, follow the direction of local agency officials, who can provide localized advice. Such safety precautions are particularly important if you raise chickens or have any other kind of pet bird on your property.

You can also help birds during the current avian flu outbreak in the following ways:

- If an avian flu outbreak is reported in your area, consider pausing any feeding of birds at least until this wildlife morbidity/mortality event is over.
- If you find a dead bird and would like to report it, do not pick it up and check with your state health department or wildlife agency for reporting information specific to your area.
- If using a bird feeder or bird bath, maintain them with regular washes using a 10-percent bleach solution (one part bleach mixed with nine parts water), followed by a water rinse, then complete air-dry.
- Keep pets (including pet birds) away from sick or dead wild birds as a standard precaution.

American Bird Conservancy

The Nature of Education

(Continued from P. 3)

behaviors. At Randall Davey, the students themselves often react to the field trips positively. Asked to describe how they felt when they were outside, one fourth grader wrote: "I saw a bunch of cool stuff and felt so amazed. I learned that birds can have different feathers and some birds have different beaks." Another said simply: "Excited. Grateful. My heart was full."

Bringing Prey-go-Neesh Home

(Continued from P. 1)

California Condors likewise disappeared from most of western North America in the 20th century. The last 22 wild, free-flying birds were captured in the 1980s for a controversial but ultimately successful captive-breeding program. Since the early 1990s, condors have been reintroduced into the wild at three release areas in California and one near the Grand Canyon in Arizona. (There is another release site in Baja California.) In 2003, the Yurok Tribal Park Taskforce - a panel of elders and knowledgeable tribal members - chose Prey-go-neesh as the single most important land-based species to restore. At the time, I had just graduated from high school, unsure of what I wanted to do with my life. But I loved science and pursued a bachelor's degree in biochemical sciences at Harvard University. Upon graduation in 2007, I was provided with an opportunity to return home through an internship program, and in 2008, the Yurok Tribe received a federal grant for a feasibility analysis of bringing Prey-go-neesh home. I and wildlife biologist Chris West were hired for the new Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department, with the California Condor as its flagship species.

We started by studying our area's habitat suitability for condors, and assessing the risk from lead contamination and organochlorine pesticides, including DDT - the two major contributing factors to condor declines. We identified a strong potential release site within the Yurok ancestral territory and Redwood National Park boundaries. Within this area, sea lions had much lower DDT levels than sea lions in central California. Lead levels were still concerning, but we reached out to hunters, with many of them agreeing to use non-lead ammunition.

On May 3, the first two juvenile birds from the California Condor Recovery Program were introduced to Yurok ancestral territory. Two more are scheduled to be released this spring, after acclimatizing to our region in an outdoor pen. And then for the next 20 years, the Yurok Tribe and Redwood National Park plan to release an additional six condors every year. We are currently partnering with our local Sequoia Park Zoo to build a Condor Care Center for nearby triage and treatment, as well as coordinating with veterinary facilities along the West Coast to provide care for these treasured condors throughout their ranges.

It's been quite the journey. Over the last 14 years I've gotten married, had a child and sprouted significantly more gray hair. Our two-person team has grown; I'm now director of a 16-member tribal wildlife department that supports a variety of tribal restoration needs.

The hope and excitement throughout our community, including that of my 3-year-old daughter who loves her "Go-neesh," give me strength. She's going to be part of the first generation of Yurok children in over a century who grow up with condors in their sky. I think of all these things, and all the work and prayers started long before I was even born, and I know that this was always meant to be my path, our story.

