

California Condors Reproduce Asexually

What is a condor?

- A condor is a type of bird. There are two species - the California and Andean. There are around 6,700 adult Andean condors in the wild.
- The California condor is **critically endangered** with only 201 adults in the wild. It is the largest flying bird in North America.

A pair of female California condors have produced offspring without needing males, say scientists at San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance (SDZWA).

They join other species, such as sharks and Komodo dragons, that can produce young in this way.

Tests were carried out on **captive** California condors at SDZWA. They showed that two offspring hatched in 2001 and 2009.

To the scientists' surprise, the chicks had no **DNA** linked to a male. They only shared DNA with their mothers. Despite male California condors being present, the females produced young without them.

This type of reproduction is called asexual reproduction. This is where only one parent is needed to produce young.

Asexual reproduction is not common in birds. One of the only birds known to reproduce this way is the turkey.

Oliver Ryder works for the SDZWA. He said, "These findings now raise questions about whether this might occur **undetected** in other species."



Illustration: A pair of California condors.

California condors have been at risk of going extinct since the 1980s. In 1982, there were just 23 of these birds remaining in the world.

To help increase numbers, the SDZWA has been breeding California condors. They regularly test the chicks to see how successful they have been.

This is how they found out that the two chicks had been born through asexual reproduction. Sadly, both of the chicks died at young ages. In the wild, California condors can live for up to 60 years.

Scientists are hopeful that these latest findings could help increase their low numbers.

If successful, it could save these birds from the brink of extinction.

Glossary

critically endangered	A species at high risk of going extinct.
captive	An animal living in an enclosed environment.
DNA	The material that makes up a living thing.
undetected	To not be seen or discovered.