



Condor: To the Brink and Back-- the Life and Times of One Giant Bird

By Nielsen, John

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The California condor has been described as a bird "with one wing in the grave." Flying on wings nearly ten feet wide from tip to tip, these birds thrived on the carcasses of animals like woolly mammoths. Then, as humans began dramatically reshaping North America, the continent's largest flying land bird started disappearing. By the beginning of the twentieth century, extinction seemed inevitable. But small groups of passionate individuals refused to allow the condor to fade away, even as they fought over how and why the bird was to be saved. Scientists, farmers, developers, bir... If cats have nine lives, then the California condor as a species must be their equal. These birds have stepped to the edge of the extinction cliff and ALMOST fallen to a crushing collapse. After reading their story, you have to wonder if the creator was playing a cruel joke on this ancient and giant bird.Â As Nielson explains, the California condor is a relic from the Pleistocene era. In those prehistoric times giant North American mammoths, mastodons, ground sloths and oversize bison roamed vast areas of what would eventually become the American West. And so there was no shortage of carcasses available to scavengers like ravens, vultures and much larger birds like the California condor. Condor: To the Brink and Back--the Life and Times of One Giant Bird. By John Nielsen. RatingsÂ Today the giant birds are nowhere near extinct. The giant bird with "one wing in the grave" appears to be recovering, even as the wildlands it needs keep disappearing. But the story of this bird is more than the story of a vulture with a giant wingspan -- it is also the story of a wild and giant state that has become crowded and small, and of the behind-the-scenes dramas that have shaped the environmental movement. As told by John Nielsen, an environmental journalist and a native Californian, this is a fascinating tale of survival. When the opening paragraph compares trapping these birds to waiting in a shallow grave, you may consider if you have the stomach for this material. But if you can read with an objective eye, you may be rewarded by this fascinating account of the project that prevented the extinction of the California condor. Written in a journalist style for lay readers, this book is not a natural history primer. Enough science is included for the lay reader to understand what the biologists and wildlife managers are doing but readers are not overwhelmed with technical details. Individuals (people and birds) a Today the giant birds are nowhere near extinct. The giant bird with "one wing in the grave" appears to be recovering, even as the wildlands it needs keep disappearing. But the story of this bird is more than the story of a vulture with a giant wingspan -- it is also the story of a wild and giant state that has become crowded and small, and of the behind-the-scenes dramas that have shaped the environmental movement.Â I thought this would be an uplifting book, about condors coming back from the brink of extinction, but I found it extremely depressing. Let's just say the history of California is a trail of destruction, death, and the raping of The information on the natural history of the condor was interesting, and the reason I wanted to read this book.