



Photo still from *Shadow of the Condor*

## Santa Barbara Filmmaker: Jeff McLoughlin

# Shadow of the Condor

By Daniel Kepl / CASA

**SANTA BARBARA-BASED DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER** Jeff McLoughlin's *Shadow of the Condor*, tells the story of the ongoing challenge of rebuilding a self-sustaining population of California condors nearly 40 years after their designation as endangered. The challenges faced in returning the prehistoric species *Gymnogyps californianus* to an environment that threatens its independent survival are met by dedicated volunteers and professionals.

"What I set out to make is a film that lays out the commitment it takes to save a species from extinction," McLoughlin explained. "That passion is really what has driven the successful recovery of the California condor.

Without the heart that biologists and zookeepers put into this work on a daily basis, this species would be gone from the earth."

The cause of the near extinction of the California condor, which numbered just nine birds in the wild in 1985 was lead poisoning from spent ammunition, micro-trash that birds inexplicably feed their young, and the threat of urban development within their foraging range. Human intervention became necessary to save the species. The outlook for condor survival is better today, with over 450 condors thriving in three separate California populations of about 150 birds each.

Inspired as a youth by the ocean wildlife films of Jacques Cousteau, McLoughlin trained in film

production, theory, and criticism in the late 70's and went on to pursue a career producing several hundred product and promotional videos, as well as web, multimedia, and print collateral projects for business and marketing clients. A resident of Santa Barbara since 1969

McLoughlin stepped away from corporate film in 2009. *Shadow of the Condor* is McLoughlin's first feature length documentary.

Shot over a two-year period, *Shadow of the Condor* follows Ventura-based biologist Joseph Brandt as he tries to establish a successful nest for a pair of condors in the wild. "The extreme lengths that Joseph and the others in the recovery effort go to in pursuit of this goal, makes this an interesting and emotionally engaging film," McLoughlin

reports. Segments shot in the San Diego, Los Angeles, and Oregon Zoo's, reveal the complexities of the species recovery effort.

"The *Condor* story has its roots in Santa Barbara," McLoughlin explained, "and the film includes a segment with the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History's Janet Hamber, a biologist with a 40 year history with the condor recovery effort. She relates the trapping and capture of the very last of the wild California condors in 1987, a poignant and moving moment in the film."

McLoughlin described one condor that is followed closely in the film: "We get up close and personal with a bird named Pitahsi, a Chumash name meaning 'the power within,' and come to understand the broad reach humans



Jeff McLoughlin,  
Director



Condor chick in hand

have into the remote corners of the backcountry. The interactions that biologist Joseph Brandt has with this condor are probably the most compelling scenes in the film," McLoughlin reported.

McLoughlin hopes viewers will come away from *Shadow of the Condor* with a deeper appreciation of this rare and ancient animal, which has survived for eons, yet risks extinction in modern times. "Not many would ever have imagined that spent lead ammunition in hunter-shot game would harm a beautiful, soaring bird. But it does, and with just a few small changes, we can fix that. Hunting actually provides a great food source for condors and other scavengers," McLoughlin continued. "A simple change from a lead bullet to a copper one would mean one less toxic substance cast out onto the earth by humans. Yes, it will cost a few extra dollars, but I think most would agree that watching a bird with a ten-foot wingspan soar over your head is worth every penny."

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