

Wildlife

Zion is home to a diverse and robust population of wildlife, including 78 species of mammals, 291 birds, 30 reptiles, 7 amphibians, and 8 fish. Though all animals in the park are protected by the National Park designation, certain endangered, threatened, and sensitive species in Zion warrant special attention from wildlife biologists.

California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*)

California condors are the largest land bird in North America, with a wing span of up to 9.5 feet. Condors were listed as an endangered species in 1967 and by 1982 only 22 remained in the world. In 1987 the last known wild California condor was captured and placed in captivity. Biologists



Photograph Courtesy of Chris Parish

began releasing condors back into the wild in 1992 and their numbers continue to increase. The most significant challenge to condor recovery is lead poisoning from the ingestion of bullet fragments. As a result, wildlife agencies have developed programs to raise awareness of the issue and incentivize hunters to use non-lead ammunition.

Desert Bighorn Sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*)



Park crew transporting bighorn ram during 1973 reintroduction. Museum Catalog No. ZION 12443.10

Desert bighorn sheep occupied the area now known as Zion National park for over 12,000 years. With the arrival of white settlers in the 20th century, their numbers dramatically decreased due to unregulated hunting, human encroachment, habitat fragmentation, and diseases contracted through herds of domestic sheep. The last bighorn sighting in Zion was in 1953 on the Watchman. In the 1970s, efforts began to restore the population in the park by introducing sheep from other nearby herds. After slow initial growth, the reintroduction was deemed a success and today the bighorn population in Zion is estimated at nearly 600 sheep.



Ancient petroglyphs carved into the rocks by some of the area's native inhabitants. NPS Photo

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

The fastest animal in the world, peregrine falcons can reach speeds of up to 200 miles per hour. Once on the brink of extinction in the 1970s, peregrine falcon populations are increasing due to conservation efforts. Wildlife biologists aid



Peregrine falcon nesting sites (circled in red) along climbing routes on Angels Landing (marked in yellow). NPS Photo

in peregrine recovery by closing certain rock climbing routes in the spring to mitigate nest disruption. Many climbing routes pass near the cliff outcroppings that typically provide nesting sites for peregrines. The birds are highly territorial and have a strong attachment to their nesting sites and might abandon it, along with their young, if the site is disturbed. The wildlife program monitors nesting activity beginning in March until chicks fledge, usually in late July.



Images from NPS peregrine falcon identification card. NPS Photo