CITY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL REGULATION
111 EAST FIRST STREET

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Immediate Release

Wildlife, non-existant or on the wane in most American cities, is very much alive in the City of Los Angeles, and the people responsible for the humane care and control of all animals in the city are taking care of the wild creatures who fight for survival in the land of expanding construction.

The Los Angeles City Department of Animal Regulation has maintained a program labelled "Animal Airlift" since September, 1969.

The date, September 11, marks the sixth anniversary of the unique wildlife conservation program.

At least twice a month, small wild animals, humanely trapped within the city limits, are assembled at the West Valley Animal Shelter in Chatsworth, loaded aboard a helicopter, and relocated in the Angeles National Forest, thirty-five miles northeast of Los Angeles.

Since the inception of the program six years ago, 2402 small wild creatures have been processed through the sky lifeline to a natural habitat.

The airlift was conceived by Robert I. Rush, general manager of animal regulation department, in the interest of preserving wildlife endangered by human encroachment. The department employs two full-time wildlife trappers who daily investigate complaints of city residents concerning forays on residential property of raccoons, opossums, foxes, rabbits, squirrels, non-poisonous snakes, and, occasionally, predatory birds such as hawks and owls.

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"I believe we have a better trapping record than Hudson Bay," says Rush, "and in our program the animals retain their pelts."

On the airlift, the animals are transported in ventilated boxes, fitted into basket-like carriers which are attached to the helicopter skids. A flying cargo normally consists of twelve animals. The animals are released in prudently selected areas where food, ground cover and water are in natural supply.

Relocation sites in the forest are selected by George W. Mason, animal regulation district supervisor (airlift coordinator), Ray Schutte, city helicopter pilot, and a member of the Angeles Forest game management personnel.

Only animals native to California are released back to the wilds. Other wild animals found in the city are given sanctuary in zoos or similar facilities. Deer that occasionally wander into Los Angeles urban areas are corralled and returned to a native habitat by vehicle.

The airlift operation was jeopardized on only one occasion when a snake escaped from a sack inside the cockpit of the helicopter. A thorough search of the helicopter, on landing, revealed the reptile coiled in the springs beneath Pilot Schutte's seat.

Schutte still flies the airlift. But he has assumed new self-appointed responsibilities. He is now the snake bag inspector prior to take-off.

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