Mike Burns

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

CONTACT: Jim McNamara
Department of Animal Regulation
Telephone: 485-5771

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Los Angeles, with all its hustle and bustle, still has a heart for preserving the wildlife that roams its asphalt jungles. Probably no city in the world takes the time, as Los Angeles does, to preserve the declining vestiges of wildlife that hangs on in the face of urban growth.

September marks the fifth anniversary of the Los Angeles City Animal Airlift, a program wherein small wild creatures, humanely trapped in the City, are flown by helicopter to sites of relocation in Angeles National Forest, 35 miles away.

Since the program's inception in 1969, 2150 small wild animals have been relocated.

Each week throughout the year, small wild animals, humanely caught in box traps in all sections of the City, are assembled at the West Valley Animal Shelter in the San Fernando Valley to await the flight departure for new homes in the forestal recesses of Angeles Forest.

Aboard the airlift helicopter on its regular trips are varied species of wildlife including raccoons, opossum, foxes, squirrels, rabbits, owls, hawks and nonpoisonous snakes. The animals are released at diverse relocation points in the forest where food, shelter and water are available. Sites, conducive to survival, are selected by West Valley Shelter District

Supervisor George W. Mason in conjunction with game management personnel of the Angeles Forest. Mason and Los Angeles Helicopter Pilot Ray Schutte comprise the flying team that transports the animals from almost certain extinction in Los Angeles to survival in a habitat compatible to wildlife.

The Los Angeles Animal Airlift was conceived and implemented by Robert I. Rush, general manager of the Los Angeles City Department of Animal Regulation. Only animals native to California are released in the wilds. Other wild animals found in the City are given sanctuary in zoos or similar facilities. Deer, frequently found in Los Angeles urban areas, are corralled and returned to native habitat by vehicle.

Rush says the Airlift is an extremely popular program with home owners who are harassed by wild creatures foraging for food and shelter.

"The majority of people who call us about raccoons in their attics, or opossums or foxes in their backyards are relieved when we tell them the animals won't be killed, but will be humanely trapped and relocated.

"Some home owners," Rush says, "want assurance that the animals will be relocated before calling in our trappers."

As the Animal Airlift begins its sixth year of operation, wildlife conservation in Los Angeles continues to preserve the animals born to the asphalt jungle.

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