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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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A unique wildlife conservation program, conducted by the Los Angeles City Department of Animal Regulation, began its second year of operation in September, 1970.

The program, named Animal Airlift, is oriented towards the conservation of wildlife humanely trapped in the City of Los Angeles.

Each week, 12-14 small wild animals (predatory birds, non-poisonous snakes), found in the City, are transported by helicopter to Angeles National Forest, 35 miles northeast of Los Angeles. There, they are relocated in a natural habitat, replete with water, food and shelter.

Since the inception of the program, September 11, 1969, to April 1, 1971, a total of 803 wild animals, birds and non-poisonous reptiles have been relocated in 64 helicopter flights.

The Animal Airlift has attracted national attention, and generated interest abroad, according to Robert I. Rush, General Manager of the Los Angeles City Department of Animal Regulation.

The Los Angeles conservation project, currently under the supervision of George W. Mason, Animal Shelter District Supervisor,

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was launched in 1960, but a major change occurred in September, 1969, when helicopters were pressed into service. Through the use of air transportation, it became possible to re-locate animals in more favorable areas which are inaccessible to ground vehicles.

The ground release areas are carefully selected by Leon Fisher, Game Manager of the Angeles National Forest, with stress laid on the availability of water, food and shelter.

Once each week, wildlife specimens are collected by Mason and Ray Schutte, Helicopter Pilot for the City's Bureau of Transportation (Board of Public Works) from the six Los Angeles City Animal Shelters.

The Shelters are located at 215 West Ann Street; 11950 Missouri Avenue, West Los Angeles; 13131 Sherman Way, North Hollywood; 3612 Eleventh Avenue; 735 Battery Street, San Pedro; and 20655 Plummer Street, Chatsworth.

The helicopter is based at 1000 South Flower Street in Glendale, and makes landings at heliports near the Shelters.

The helicopter is capable of carrying the animals with no modification to the aircraft, according to Joe Purko, Director of the Bureau of Transportation.

The flying cargo on any trip may include opossums, racoons, foxes, hawks, owls, non-poisonous snakes, or any small creature indigenous to California forested areas. Other forms of wildlife such as deer, which cannot be transported by helicopter, are re-located in accessible wooded areas by Animal Collection Vehicles.

Rush noted there are two basic courses of action open in solving the complexities created by wild animals in areas of human habitation. One, he said, is wholesale destruction of wild animal life; the other entails re-location and conservation of the animals.

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"Our Department believes in the conservation approach," Rush declared. "Wild animals were placed on this earth for a purpose. For one thing, they play a vital role in the balance of nature. It is incumbent on all of us to preserve the lives of animals whose fate is ours to decide."

Only animals native to California are released back to the wilds. Other animals are given sanctuary in zoos or similar facilities.

Land, air and water, Rush emphasised, are the key elements of animal habitat. With Los Angeles' booming population daily encroaching on wildlife domains and eliminating these elements of survival, it is the responsibility of man, according to Rush, to re-locate animals.

Mayor Sam Yorty said the airborne program is the first of its kind in the country, and added, "what can be done here can be accomplished elsewhere."

Yorty urged other cities and counties in the country to re-evaluate their wildlife problems.

"Virtually every community has some form of wild animal life to consider," he said. "It's a problem that requires constant attention and remedial action."

Yorty pointed out that with the use of the helicopter, which saves time and money in re-location of animals, Los Angeles has established an animal conservation program that other communities might well emulate.

He said, "Success of any conservation program hinges on individual community initiative. Accordingly, it behooves all local governmental agencies to expedite all conservation efforts, not only in terms of wildlife, but in areas embracing all forms of resources. These

community efforts should be implemented in concert with State and Federal Conservation Agencies.

"Conversely," he added, "the State and Federal Agencies should encourage and support local government in this activity."

The program has been endorsed by the California Fish and Game Department, the United States Forestry Service and the Audubon Society of Los Angeles.

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