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DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL REGULATION
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A small wild animal trapped in the City of Los Angeles has it "made" as far as normal survival is concerned.

In a program called Animal Airlift, more than a thousand wild creatures, humanely trapped in the City since September, 1969, have been given a renewed lease on life in Angeles National Forest.

The second anniversary of the Airlift will be observed Thursday, September 9. The wildlife conservation project was launched two years ago when a helicopter transported the first contingent of small animals from Van Nuys Municipal Airport to the Forest for relocation.

The conservation program is the brainchild of Robert I. Rush, General Manager of the Los Angeles City Department of Animal Regulation. A strong supporter of wildlife conservation, Rush notes there are two courses of action open in dealing with wildlife found in areas of human habitation.

"The simple solution is on-the-spot destruction," he says. "The alternative is conservation and relocation." He has implemented the alternative.

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Each week, wild animals trapped in the City and impounded at the six City Animal Shelters, are assembled at the West Valley Shelter in Chatsworth. There, under the supervision of Shelter Supervisor George W. Mason, the animals are placed in ventilated boxes and secured to the frame of the helicopter for the 35-mile flight to the Forest.

During the first two years of the operation, which is unique in the country, Mason and Ray Schutte, helicopter pilot for the City's Bureau of Transportation, have flown every trip. 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, raccoons, foxes, hawks, owls, non-poisonous snakes, or any small creature indigenous to California forested areas. Other forms of wildlife, such as deer, that wander into inhabited areas and cannot be transported by helicopter are relocated in accessible wooded areas by Animal Collection vehicles.

For those animals aboard the helicopter ground release sites are judiciously selected by Leon Fisher, Game Manager of the Angeles National Forest. Priority is given to the availability of food, water and shelter.

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

With Los Angeles' rapid growth daily encroaching on wildlife domains, thereby sharply reducing an animal's chances for survival, Rush believes it incumbent on man to relocate the wildlife.

"Wild animals were placed on this earth for a purpose," he maintains. "Most important, they play a vital role in the balance of nature."

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The unique program has attracted national recognition in the press and among conservation advocates.

Mayor Sam Yorty has praised the program as a credit to the City, and has urged other communities to follow suit.

"What can be done here, can be done elsewhere," he said.

On September 9 Mason will load wild animal number 1,015 on the helicopter for the flight to Angeles Forest.

"He'll find a lot of new friends," Mason observed.

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