



**Companion Animals  
in the Canyon**



*A Guide for Topanga Animal Guardians*

*Dedicated to:  
All Creatures Great & Small*

## Co-Existing with Canyon Wildlife



Topanga is a place where the urban, populated environment interfaces with the natural environment, populated by diverse wildlife. It is important, for the protection of our native wildlife as well as for the safety of our companion animals, to seek ways to live in harmony with the creatures with which we share our environment. When bringing companion animals such as dogs or cats into Topanga, it is important to be aware that they can impact, as well as be impacted by, the indigenous animals that are a part of our canyon ecosystem.

### Companion Animals and Predators



Small dogs and puppies, old or injured dogs, cats, rabbits, chickens, ducks, goats and other small animals can be easy prey for canyon predators such as coyotes, bobcats, owls and hawks. Coyotes and bobcats, although excellent hunters of their own natural prey, will not hesitate to kill domestic animals when given the opportunity. Owls, too, can take small animals weighing up to eight pounds, and hawks have been known to prey on small kittens and rabbits. It is our fundamental responsibility as guardians to provide protection to all domestic and companion animals while, at the same time, discouraging predatory animals in a humane and responsible way.

#### Suggestions:

- Keep your animals indoors, especially at night.
- House outdoor poultry, rabbits or goats in secure, covered enclosures made of *heavy* mesh wire (not chicken wire).
- Walk your dog on a leash in well-lit areas at night.
- Do not allow dogs or cats to roam from home.
- Keep all outdoor trash can lids securely closed.
- Keep all pet food indoors.
- Pick backyard fruit as soon as it ripens and keep rotten fruit off the ground.
- Do not feed predatory wild animals.



### Cats, Native Birds and Other Small Animals

Domestic cats are natural hunters. Unfortunately, cats, which are kept outdoors in Topanga, can negatively impact our native songbird, lizard and small rodent populations by preying upon them, thereby upsetting the canyon ecosystem.

#### Suggestion:

- Keep your cat indoors or in a secure, indoor-outdoor enclosure. This not only protects our local wildlife, but it can have the added benefit of providing your cat a longer, healthier life.

*Note: A recent study showed that cats wearing bells actually had a higher kill rate than those without bells.*

## Dogs in Parks



Dogs allowed to roam on State Park or Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy land can negatively impact our native wildlife by leaving scent trails, which can disturb the territorial claim of coyotes, and by chasing wild animals such as deer, rabbits and other small animals. They can also contract or spread contagious diseases such as parvovirus and distemper. Parkland and wilderness areas are the home of our local wildlife and should incur a minimum of intrusion.

### Suggestions:

- Walk your dog on a leash whenever you take him or her off your property.
- Do not allow your dog to roam from home.
- Do not allow your dog to enter State Park property, it is illegal.
- Limit dog walks in Topanga to neighborhood roads and fire roads and be sure to pick up and dispose of all animal wastes.



## Companion Animals and Potential Canyon Hazards



### Rattlesnakes

Topanga is home to a variety of snakes. It is important to know the difference between potentially dangerous rattlesnakes and harmless and beneficial snakes such as gopher and king snakes. Both dogs and cats, with their natural curiosity, can easily become victims of snakebites.

Remember that a rattlesnake bite constitutes a medical emergency and, as such, requires *immediate professional help*. If a rattlesnake bite does occur:

- Seek immediate veterinary help. Call ahead to make sure the veterinarian has antivenin on hand and is equipped to handle snakebites.
- Keep companion animal still and carry if possible; Do not apply tourniquet or cut wound.
- For more information, contact Animal Clinic of Topanga at 310-455-1330. See emergency animal hospital numbers on back page.

### Suggestions:

- Keep your yard free of debris piles, wood piles and thick brush.
- Keep your cat indoors.
- Keep dogs out of tall grass and out of wildlife areas, especially during spring and summer months.
- Walk your dog on a leash and do not allow him or her to roam.
- Inspect your home for small openings and entryways and seal them.
- Keep doors and low windows closed at night and anytime you are not at home; install screen doors.
- Install screen doors.
- If you encounter a rattlesnake in your house or yard, call the Topanga Fire Department at 310-455-1766 if someone is in danger; or John MacNeil at 310-455-2013 to capture and relocate.

*Note: Be particularly wary of baby rattlesnakes because their venom is more potent than that of adult snakes, and they release all their venom when biting.*

## Ticks



Ticks are common in wooded areas throughout the canyon. Ticks are parasites that feed on mammalian blood and can transmit serious disease, such as Lyme Disease. April through October is considered "tick season" although precaution should be taken year round. Check animals thoroughly after any activity in wooded or brush areas. If a tick is found:

- Remove tick carefully with tweezers grabbing it as close to the skin as possible.
  - Do not squeeze tick's body, apply Vaseline, use heat or flame or attempt to clean with alcohol while the tick is still attached.
- Any of these actions could transmit bacteria that cause disease.

## Other Insects & Arachnids



There are other insects and arachnids in the canyon that can be problematic for animals as well as humans. Among these are bees, yellow jackets, Black Widow spiders and scorpions. Reactions to their bites can range from mild to severe, so become familiar with these insects and take precautions to protect yourself and your animals.

## Foxtails



A serious hazard for dogs and cats during the spring and summer months in Topanga are the seed-bearing structures of some kinds of grasses commonly known as "foxtails." Foxtails have sharp points at one end and microscopic barbs, so they can easily become imbedded in an animal's fur, and especially between the toes and armpits. They can work their way into any body opening, particularly the ears, eyes and nostrils, and can penetrate the skin, eventually working their way into the body. Left untreated, foxtails can cause serious infections and even death.

## Suggestions:

- If your animal is rubbing or pawing at the ears or eyes, shaking the head, sneezing violently, gagging, licking or biting at any part of the body, or if you notice any signs of skin inflammation, seek veterinary help a.s.a.p.
- For prevention, brush animals daily, check the ears and between the toes. Keep long-haired dogs clipped and avoid dry, weedy areas.

## Poison Oak



Poison Oak, a member of the Sumac family, is prevalent throughout the canyon. Since animals' fur protects their skin from the poison oil, they won't get a rash, however, the oil will remain on their fur upon contact and can contaminate you when you touch them. Removal of the oil with an effective cleanser can help. Learn to identify these plants and avoid.

## **Companion Animals and Emergency Preparedness**

When preparing for a disaster such as fire or earthquake, don't forget to include supplies for your companion animal. Prepare in advance. Make sure his or her I.D. tag is up to date with accurate information including a list of veterinarians and medications.

Emergency supplies should include a sturdy animal carrier, leash, food and water for three days, unbreakable bowl, medications, recent

## Emergency Preparedness (Continued)

photo of you with your animal companion, copy of vaccination records, blankets, paper towels, portable litter box and litter, trash bags and a basic first aid kit. Keep all emergency supplies in an accessible location.

### Suggestions:

- Do not leave animals behind in a disaster. You may not be able to get back to your home for several days or weeks.
- Make a plan with neighbors for evacuation in case you are unable to return home immediately.
- Animals are not allowed in emergency shelters, so make arrangements now with friends or family out of the canyon to take your companion animal in the event of disaster.
- During a disaster, stray animals in Topanga will be received and handled by our T-CEP Pet Disaster Team in conjunction with L.A. County Animal Control. They will be vaccinated at guardian's expense, so have copies of current vaccination records on hand.
- Contact T-CEP's Pet Disaster Team at 310-455-7268.

## The Importance of Vaccinations

Rabies, distemper and parvovirus are just a few of the serious diseases that can be transmitted between wild and domestic animals. In addition to keeping domestic animals out of wildlife areas and taking measures to make sure your yard does not attract wild animals such as raccoons and coyotes, it's important to keep all dogs and cats in the canyon vaccinated against these and other contagious diseases. For more information, call Animal Clinic of Topanga at 310-455-1330.

## The Case for Spaying and Neutering



Statistics show that for every one person that is born, fifteen dogs and forty-five cats are also born. Companion animal overpopulation is a serious problem – only one out of every ten dogs and one out of every twelve cats *ever* finds a permanent home. Sadly, in Los Angeles County alone, over 150,000 dogs and cats are destroyed each year simply because there are not enough homes.

Have a heart, be smart and have your dog, cat, and even your rabbit, spayed or neutered as soon as he or she is mature enough to do so. Spaying and neutering not only reduces overpopulation, it can reduce the urge to wander, improve behavior in general and increase your animal's life span. For more information, call Animal Clinic of Topanga at 310-455-1330.

## Lost Animals

Nothing is more heartbreaking than losing a beloved companion animal. Take precautions. Keep your house and yard secure, do not allow animals to roam away from home and make sure companion animal I.D. tags are kept up to date with accurate information. You may also want to consider having your dog or cat microchipped. If an animal is lost:

- Canvas your neighborhood and surrounding area. Talk with neighbors and show them a picture of the animal if possible.
- Visit and revisit local animal shelters. Sometimes, when someone finds a lost animal, they will keep the animal for a few days before taking them to a shelter. The important thing is to keep checking local shelters in person.
- Check with local park rangers. Often, animals wander into park and wilderness areas (see phone numbers below).
- Post "lost" signs in your neighborhood and on bulletin boards in town with an accurate description and photo of the animal and where and when he or she was last seen. Remove signs when animal has been found.
- Place a "lost animal" ad in our local newspaper, the *Messenger*.
- Go on the internet. Both Topanga websites, [topangaonline.com](http://topangaonline.com) and [topangamessenger.com](http://topangamessenger.com), have "lost and found animal" sections where you can post and find information.

## Being A Good Neighbor

Because Topanga is a semirural area, many people are tempted to allow dogs to roam free in canyon neighborhoods. It's important to remember that as an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County, Topanga is subject to the same leash laws as other areas in the county. Canine companions should be on a leash and under your supervision whenever taken off your property. For their own safety and that of others, dogs should never be free to chase cars, people or other animals.

## Important Phone Numbers



### Local Animal Shelters:

Agoura Animal Shelter .....	818-991-0071
West Valley Animal Shelter .....	888-452-7381
Santa Monica Animal Shelter .....	310-458-8594

### Animal Health Care and Information:

Animal Clinic of Topanga, Dr. Holly Scoren .....	310-455-1330
Topanga Animal Rescue, Susan Alice Clark .....	310-455-7268

### Emergency Animal Hospitals:

California Animal Hospital .....	310-473-1561
Animal Critical Care .....	818-887-2262

### Disaster Information:

T-CEP Pet Disaster Team .....	310-455-7268
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### Snake Removal:

Topanga Fire Department .....	310-455-1766
John MacNeil (capture & release) .....	310-455-2013

### Park Rangers:

Topanga State Park .....	310-455-2465
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy .....	310-589-3200

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