



CO-EXISTING WITH CANYON WILDLIFE

A HUMANE GUIDE FOR RESIDENTS OF TOPANGA

*“When we try to pick out anything by itself,
we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.”
-John Muir*



CO-EXISTING WITH CANYON WILDLIFE

A HUMANE GUIDE FOR RESIDENTS OF TOPANGA

SHARED SPACE: LIVING IN HARMONY WITH CANYON WILDLIFE

Topanga is a place where the urban, populated environment interfaces with the natural environment, populated by diverse wildlife. Most of us are thrilled to experience the privilege of sharing this environment with its wild inhabitants. Indeed, all we need do is gaze out our window or step outside to enjoy such things as the antics of a ground squirrel, the grace of a mule deer or the devotion of a pair of mourning doves. Our local wildlife can be wonderful neighbors – a way for us to remain connected to the natural environment. We benefit from their presence in other ways, too. Many native species control populations of rodents and insects, while others help keep roadways and neighborhoods clean by removing carrion, to name just two. Yet, wherever humans and wildlife co-exist, problems can occur. Most of these problems seem to come about when wild creatures find their way into our homes, yards or gardens. The purpose of this booklet is to provide humane, environmentally-responsible remedy options to some of the most common human-wildlife problems in our area. With a little knowledge and patience, we can all learn to live in harmony with our canyon wildlife.

THINK BEFORE ACTING

In general, it's a good idea to leave canyon wildlife undisturbed. That said, if a critter makes its way into what you consider "your territory," and you feel it poses some kind of threat to health or safety, you will probably want to take some kind of action. Whenever possible, first take some time to think about it. Many of us assume that a certain type of creature is a problem, when in fact, under many circumstances, an assumed "pest" poses no problem at all. For example, many snakes, spiders and insects are not only harmless to humans, they quite often help reduce populations of critters that can cause real problems. Another example: a beehive in the hollow of a tree that is many yards from your home does not necessarily pose a threat if you are aware that it is there, know to avoid it, and alert everyone in your household of its presence. Such a presence can actually be a good learning experience for a child, who can be taught to observe the behavior of the bees from a safe distance and to respect them as an integral player in the web of life.

HUMANE REMEDY OPTIONS

In the past, the so-called 'solution' to human-wildlife problems has been simply to kill "offending" critters by trapping, poisoning or some other lethal means. These methods are not only cruel and inhumane, they are damaging to the ecosystem, have the potential to harm companion animals and children and, generally, do not solve the problem over the long term. Poisoning, especially, can be devastating, not only for the targeted creature, but for any others, wild or domestic, that feed on the dead or dying animal or accidentally ingest the poison. As caring and compassionate people, it is important that we seek both humane and environmentally-responsible solutions to problems with wildlife whenever possible. Thankfully, those solutions are available to us, and they can be as simple as removing attractants to our homes and yards or using non-toxic repellents or other deterrents.

When other humane methods fail, it may be possible to humanely trap and relocate some creatures; however, this should be done by someone qualified to handle wildlife and should not be considered unless there's an immediate threat to health or safety. Especially when animals are nesting in your attic, chimney, cellar or some other unused portion of your property, the best strategy is to give the animals a grace period of a few weeks until youngsters are grown, at which time they will usually leave on their own. Then, make sure all animals are gone, find all entry holes and seal them. Live trapping is very traumatic for wildlife, and relocated animals have low survival rates when released in unfamiliar areas. Remember that if live trapping is absolutely necessary, animal families (mother and babies) should be humanely captured and released together. For more information, contact the California Wildlife Center at 310-457-WILD.

While the incidence is extremely rare, it should be emphasized here that any mammal infected with rabies can be dangerous. Those living in Topanga should learn how to read the signs of rabies. If you encounter an animal that is exhibiting the symptoms of rabies, or is otherwise sick or injured, do not approach it; seek expert assistance.

Similarly, it's a good idea to learn about the common stinging and biting insects, spiders and snakes living in Topanga and, in turn, teach young children what is not safe to touch. For more information on this subject, contact the Topanga Canyon Docents at 310-534-9400.

PREVENTION IS KEY

The first step in reducing human-wildlife problems is prevention. This starts with removing attractants, like food, water or shelter, that attract wild animals to our home or yard. Some attractions, like a hummingbird feeder, are deliberate, and the animals that come to visit are very welcome. Other attractions, like fruit fallen from trees, debris piles, garbage and compost, may attract critters that can cause unwelcome problems. Here are several steps to take in general to minimize the attractiveness of your home or yard to these types of problems:

- Inspect your home for small openings and entryways and seal them; cap your chimney; keep doors and low windows closed at night and anytime you are not at home and/or install screen doors.
- Trim tree limbs away from the roof.
- Keep your property clean and free of debris piles, woodpiles, and thick brush near your home.
- Harvest for food, or collect for composting, all fallen fruit and ripe fruit still hanging from trees.
- Put trash and recyclables out as close to pick up time as possible. Keep containers tightly sealed and/or keep them in a latched enclosure.
- When composting, use enclosed bins. Avoid adding dog or cat waste or any food containing meat, milk or eggs.
- Keep companion animal food and water inside, especially at night.
- Do not feed wild animals. If you feed wild birds, put out only small amounts of seed or use squirrel-proof bird feeders. Birdseed attracts squirrels and rabbits that, in turn, attract coyotes and other predators.

POTENTIAL HUMAN-WILDLIFE PROBLEMS

BATS. Haunted by centuries of “old wives’ tales,” this flying mammal is actually one of nature’s gentler creatures and one of the most beneficial. One bat may consume up to 600 insects, including mosquitoes, an hour. There are several species of bats living in the canyon (the vampire bat is not one of them). The rate of rabies among bats is very low (less than 1/2 of 1%), but be careful if there is ever a need to handle them, and never pick-up a bat that appears sick. Bats are attracted to warm, dark areas to roost, so they sometimes find their way into buildings. While they don’t cause any real damage, they may frighten some occupants and leave objectionable droppings (guano). **Note:** *Bat guano, which has the highest percentage of nitrogen, is extremely beneficial in the garden, but be careful when handling it and try not to breathe it in.*

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- If a bat is in the house, do not panic. Keep animals away, confine the bat to one room and open a window or exterior door – they will usually fly out on their own. If the bat is not flying, check draperies or other places where the bat can hang easily, and with a thick towel, very gently capture and release it outside.
- If bats are residing in an attic or other area of the house, wait until they leave at nightfall, and, when you are sure all bats are gone, seal the holes and cracks where they may have entered.
- Bat-proof your home during the months of September-October or March-April. Doing so at other times may cause young bats to become trapped inside.
- After excluding bats from the home, provide alternate roosting sites such as bat houses to continue to benefit from their presence.
- For more information about bats, contact Bat Conservation International at 800-538-2287 or on the web at www.batcon.org
- For questions or concerns about bats in Topanga, contact Jackie Safanov at 310-455-3157 or Rosi Dagit at 310-455-7528.

BIRDS. Topanga is home to a great variety of birds. Each plays a unique role in the canyon ecosystem. The problems encountered, while usually not serious, vary depending on the type of bird. For example, songbirds may fly into open windows or build nests in chimneys; ravens may disturb gardens; and woodpeckers may drum on houses.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Cap the chimney to prevent birds (and other animals) from nesting in it. This should be done in the fall to prevent baby birds from being trapped inside.
- To keep birds away from an area, use reflective tape or model owls.
- To discourage drumming, modify the site by covering it with fabric or other non-toxic material.
- To safely release birds who have become trapped in skylights or other areas of a home, keep companion animals away, confine the bird to one room and open a window or outside door. If the bird does not fly out on its own, try these two methods: (1) use a dust mop or sponge mop and slowly move it closer and closer to the bird until it is forced to move or perch on the mop head. On the first few tries, the bird will usually attempt to avoid the mop, but eventually it will try perching on the mop head. When it does, bring it slowly to an open window or door and shake it gently to get the bird to fly; (2) simply approach the bird slowly from below and behind with your hand. Keep your hand wide-open just before you reach the bird. Slowly close your fingers around the bird to create a gentle cage, holding the wings closed. Bring the bird to an open window and release gently. **Note:** *Be aware that hummingbirds can go into a state of torpor in which the bird appears to be dead, but is not. If this happens, seek immediate expert assistance.*
- For more information about the many birds of Topanga, contact Gerry Haigh, the “Birdman of Topanga” at 310-455-1696.
- For orphaned or injured birds, contact Topanga Animal Rescue at 310-455-7268.



FIELD RATS & MICE. Field rats and mice are common throughout the canyon. During extreme weather conditions, or if they have easy access and food or water is available, they may invade a home. Live traps can be used to humanely trap and relocate rats and mice, but unless you rat and mouse-proof your house, you will have a continual problem.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Rats and mice can squeeze through extremely small spaces. Conduct a thorough inspection of your home to ensure that there are no holes or cracks that a rat or mouse could squeeze through and then seal them.
- Remove debris piles, woodpiles, weeds, tall brush or dense ground cover near your home where rats or mice may be nesting.
- Practice good housekeeping.
- Remove food sources by cleaning up spilled food and storing food in glass, metal or plastic containers with lids.
- If you garden or keep wild birdseed, store seeds in a rat/mouse-proof container.

Note: One of the added benefits of keeping an indoor cat is that just his or her scent may cause rats and mice to shift away from a residence.

RACCOONS. Raccoons provide a service by eating insects and rodents. However, these animals are famous for getting into garbage cans and compost piles. They may also nest in places like chimneys, cellars or attics. Although playful by nature, they may get into an occasional skirmish with dogs or cats when cornered. They have also been known to eat fish out of garden ponds.



REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Put trash and recyclables out as close to pick up time as possible. Keep containers tightly sealed and/or keep them in a latched enclosure.
- For compost, use enclosed bins.
- Keep cat and dog food inside, especially at night.
- Pick backyard fruit/vegetables when ripe and keep rotten fruit/vegetables off the ground.
- Clear brush piles from your property to eliminate nesting sites.
- Trim tree limbs away from the roof.
- Do home repairs to deter raccoons in the fall. This will prevent mothers and babies or hibernating raccoons from being trapped inside. Remember, never seal an entrance until you are sure all animals are gone.
- Keep companion animals well vaccinated against rabies and distemper and have them checked occasionally for roundworms.
- Learn how to protect fish by creating shelters for them or covering ponds with netting in the evenings.

RINGTAIL CATS. Being primarily nocturnal, this smaller relative of the raccoon is rarely seen. They are excellent at insect control and are not apt to cause problems for humans. Ringtail Cats are listed as a “fully protected species” by the state of California. *Sightings should be reported to the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains at 310-455-1030.*

SKUNKS. Skunks are excellent at rodent and insect control, and their diet includes black widow spiders and scorpions. Being carrion eaters, they also help keep roadways and neighborhoods clean. Although common in the canyon, they are rarely seen and usually do not present a problem unless startled, threatened or cornered. Their spray, although notoriously malodorous, is not otherwise a health or safety hazard. As with other animals, limiting access and eliminating potential food sources are key to making your house or yard a less attractive destination.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Keep cat and dog food inside and keep dog/cat doors closed at night.
- Put trash and recyclables out as close to pick up time as possible. Keep containers tightly sealed and/or keep them in a latched enclosure.
- Keep fruit trees picked and don't leave rotten fruit on the ground.
- Securely enclose chickens to prevent skunks from eating eggs and young chicks.
- Remove debris and brush piles from your property to eliminate denning sites.
- Do home repairs to prevent access by skunks in the fall. Babies may be trapped inside if done April through August. Make sure all animals are gone before sealing an entrance.
- If you encounter a skunk while hiking, slowly turn and walk the other way.

OPOSSUMS. Opossums rarely cause problems for humans. They are excellent at rodent and insect control and are far more beneficial as scavengers than harmful for any damage they could cause. They occasionally enter homes through dog/cat doors, which can be entirely avoided by keeping cat and dog food inside and securing dog/cat doors at night.

BADGERS. Badgers are loners, so they are seldom seen by humans. Heavily impacted by loss of habitat and poisoning campaigns aimed at other animals, such as gophers and ground squirrels, badgers are listed as a “species of special concern” by the state of California. *Sightings in Topanga should be reported to the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains at 310-455-1030.*

GOPHERS & MOLES. While the burrows these animals make benefit the soil by aerating it, some people are frustrated by the mounds of dirt pushed up in the yard or the collapsing of soil in the garden. Gophers eat the roots of plants and trunks of young trees. Moles, on the other hand, eat insect larvae in the soil, so removing moles may result in an insect problem.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Place chicken wire around bulbs and roots of plants or bury it a foot beneath the top soil of yard or gardens.
- Wrap tree trunks in commercial tree wrap.
- Rotate crops each season and plant different crops in alternating rows.
- “Mole-Med”, an environmentally-friendly mole repellent, can be found at most hardware and garden stores.

GROUND SQUIRRELS. These gregarious animals normally don't cause extensive damage, however, they will feed on flowers and vegetables in gardens, and some consider their burrows to be a nuisance. If high populations of squirrels are becoming a problem in your yard, begin to look for and eliminate their food sources. For example, check to see if they are dining at your outdoor bird feeder.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Use “squirrel-proof” bird feeders that prevent squirrels from accessing the seeds inside. Or, consider other offerings of wild bird food like trees and shrubs that produce berries or flowers that attract birds but not squirrels.
Note: Do not use hot sauce or repellents on bird feeders.
- To minimize squirrel activity in your garden, use fencing made of sheet metal or hardware cloth. Fencing needs to be at least 18 inches high with about 6 inches buried in the soil.
- Invite barn owls to your property by installing barn owl boxes for natural population control.

RABBITS. Rabbits are commonly seen throughout the canyon. While many welcome their presence in their yards, others are not so happy to find them nibbling on garden vegetation and other landscape plants.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Use chicken wire fencing around gardens. Bury fencing one foot beneath the ground, and make it three feet high.
- Wrap the base of trees with wire mesh or commercial tree tape.
- Hang garlic in mesh bags or puree it, add water and spray around the garden. Non-toxic repellent sprays are also available commercially.

DEER. Deer are fairly common in the canyon. Oak woodlands are a favorite feeding area, however, if food is scarce and deer populations high, they may also be tempted by home gardens and other landscape plants. Telltale signs of deer activity in your garden are sharp hoof marks in soft ground and jagged edges where stems and leaves have been nibbled.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- There are a variety of “deer-resistant” landscape plants, trees and shrubs to make your yard less appealing to deer. For a list of deer-resistant plants, visit the website www.deerresistantplants.com or request a free copy of “Living with Deer” from the Fund for Animals at 301-585-2591.
- The use of powerful scents (such as predator urine) and non-toxic repellent sprays around the garden can also be helpful.

COYOTES. Coyotes are the foremost canine predator in the west and are an integral part of our canyon ecosystem. They help regulate the balance of nature by consuming large numbers of rodents, rabbits and other small mammals. Although excellent hunters of their own natural prey, coyotes will also kill domestic and companion animals such as cats, small dogs, puppies, old or injured dogs, ducks, chickens, rabbits and goats when given the opportunity. They rarely attack humans.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Keep cats and other small animals indoors, especially at night.
- House outdoor animals in secure, covered enclosures made of heavy, mesh wire (not chicken wire).
- Do not allow companion animals to roam from home.
- Spay or neuter canine companions to avoid attracting coyotes.
- Keep trash containers tightly sealed and keep cat and dog food indoors, especially at night.
- Use enclosed bins for composting, and do not add any foods containing meat, milk or eggs.
- Pick backyard fruit as soon as it ripens, and keep rotten fruit off the ground.
- Do not feed wildlife.
- Trapping and relocating coyotes is not recommended, viable or legal.

Note: On rare occasion, a coyote adapted to human presence as a result of feeding by humans may act aggressively. If you encounter a coyote, do not run or turn your back. Instead, calmly back out of an area. Do not challenge coyotes by looking them directly in the eye. Make yourself look bigger and make loud noises. Protect small children by standing between them and the coyote. Fight back if necessary. Very importantly, do not feed wild animals. It weakens their natural and necessary fear of humans.



GREAT HORNED OWLS. Great Horned Owls are common throughout the canyon. They spend most of their time perched high in tall trees and are excellent at rodent control. They are listed here as a potential problem given that they could possibly prey on small cats, kittens and other small domesticated animals.

REMEDY OPTION:

- Keep small animals indoors. If they must be kept outside, they should be in an area protected by heavy mesh wire or some other adequate barrier.

RED-TAILED HAWKS. Red-tailed Hawks are commonly seen in Topanga. An impressive aerial hunter with a wingspread of 4-1/2 feet, they, too, have the capability to prey on kittens, rabbits and other small domesticated animals.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Again, keep small animals indoors or in a secure outdoor enclosure.



INSECTS.

BLACK ANTS. Black ants are a problem for most people only when they are inside the house.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Place a line of cream of tartar or dried peppermint where ants are entering the house. Ants won't cross it. Some have had success with boric acid.
- Practice good housekeeping.
- Remove food sources by cleaning up spilled food and storing food in glass, metal or plastic containers with lids.

HONEYBEES. Honeybees are one of a group of insects that include wasps, hornets, fire ants and yellow jackets. They are light golden brown, and their bodies are covered with fuzz. They usually nest in old trees, spend a lot of their time collecting nectar and pollinating flowers and are extremely beneficial. Honeybees are not likely to sting while gathering nectar and pollen; however, they will protect their colony and sting in defense.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Learn how to recognize honeybee activity, i.e. buzzing or bees flying back and forth in a straight line. Teach children to be cautious and respectful of all bees.
- Periodically inspect your home and property for the presence of honeybee colonies.
- Learn how to bee-proof your home and yard.
- If you discover a swarm or colony of bees, avoid the area and keep children and animals away. Do not attempt to control the bees yourself, call a professional.
- If bees attack you, leave the area quickly. Cover your face and eyes with your arms and/or available clothing. Seek immediate shelter in a house, car or other structure where bees cannot enter. Do not stand and swat at bees or jump into water.
- For multiple stings or hypersensitive individuals, seek medical help.
- For information about compassionate removal and relocation of bees, contact "David the Beeman" at 310-207-1090 or the L.A. Honey Company at 323-264-2383.

MOTHS. Moths may eat at clothes.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Avoid using chemical mothballs. Instead, use cedar closet lining or cedar blocks, which are available at most bed and bath stores.
- Bay leaves or sachets made of lavender, mint or rosemary can be used in drawers.

POTENTIAL HUMAN-WILDLIFE DANGERS

RATTLESNAKES. Rattlesnakes are common throughout the canyon. It is important to know the difference between potentially dangerous rattlesnakes and harmless and beneficial snakes such as gopher and king snakes. 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. A rattlesnake bite constitutes a medical emergency and, as such, requires immediate professional evaluation.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Keep your yard free of debris piles, woodpiles and thick brush.
- Wear protective gloves and boots when working in or around these areas, and never reach blindly into undisturbed holes or under logs.
- Stay out of tall grass, especially during spring and summer months.
- Inspect your home for small openings and seal them.
- Keep unscreened doors and low windows closed at night.
- If you encounter a rattlesnake in your house or yard, do not try to capture it yourself. If someone is in danger, call the Topanga Fire Department at 310-455-1766, or, for removal and relocation, call John MacNeil at 310-455-2013.

BLACK WIDOW SPIDERS. Black Widow spiders are common throughout the canyon. They have slender legs, a shiny black color, with a distinctive, red “hourglass” shaped spot on their abdomen. They prefer dark, damp places like woodpiles, tree stumps, trash piles, storage sheds, vegetable gardens, stone walls and the under side of rocks. If they come indoors, they will go to dark places like corners of closets, garages or behind furniture. Shy by nature, they bite only when trapped, sat on or accidentally touched. A bite is rarely fatal, but can make one extremely sick.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Wear protective gloves whenever working in places like storage sheds, garages, or in wood or rock piles.
- Shake out blankets or clothing that have been stored in an attic, cellar or closet and not used for a long time.
- Shake out shoes carefully before putting them on.
- Never reach blindly into cupboards or behind furniture without looking first.
- If bitten, seek medical help.

Note: The vast majority of spiders in Topanga are harmless and beneficial. Spiders like “Daddy Long Legs” are excellent at reducing populations of flies, termites and other insects. Even large and impressive-looking spiders like tarantulas are, in reality, quite gentle. If you must remove spiders from your house, gently capture them in a glass jar or other container and release them outside.

TICKS. Ticks are common in wooded areas throughout the canyon. Ticks are parasites that feed on the blood of humans and other animals and can transmit serious diseases, including Lyme disease. April through October is considered the “tick season,” although precaution should be taken year-round.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- When hiking in wooded areas, wear long sleeves and light-colored, long pants and tuck your pants into your socks.
- Avoid trail margins, brush and grassy areas when in tick country.
- Check your body, and that of children and companion animals, thoroughly after any activity in wooded or brush areas.
- If a tick is found, remove it carefully with tweezers. Grab as closely to the skin as possible. Do not squeeze the 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 may cause transmission of bacteria that cause disease.
- Learn the symptoms of Lyme disease and if you have been bitten, talk to your doctor right away.
- For more information, contact the West Vector Control District at 310-915-7370.

SCORPIONS. Scorpions are fairly common in the canyon. They are about three inches long, with eight legs and a small pair of claws that look like crabs’ claws. They are usually nocturnal and more active when it rains. They prefer cool, damp places like cellars and wood or debris piles. Reactions to the sting of a scorpion can range from mild to severe.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- The best way to avoid getting stung by scorpions is to avoid the places where they like to spend time.
- Keep your yard free of debris piles, and if you are working in woodpiles, wear protective gloves.
- If you store your shoes in a garage or cellar, shake them out carefully before putting them on.
- If stung, seek medical help.

MOUNTAIN LIONS. California Mountain Lions are the largest predators remaining in the Santa Monica Mountains. In 1990, they were given “special protected mammal” status by the state of California. Being solitary, they are rarely seen, but as more people move into mountain lion habitat, encounters between humans and mountain lions are likely to increase. With a better understanding of mountain lions and their habitats, we can coexist with these magnificent animals.

REMEDY OPTIONS NEAR YOUR HOME:

- Don’t feed wildlife. By feeding deer, raccoons or other wildlife in your yard, you will inadvertently attract mountain lions, which prey upon them.
- “Deer-proof” your landscape; remove dense or low-lying vegetation around your home; install outdoor lighting activated by motion sensors.
- Keep companion and domestic animals secure.
- Keep close watch over children and make sure they are in before dusk and not out before dawn.
- Educate children about mountain lions and what to do if they encounter one.
- When hiking, don’t hike alone. Go with a partner or with a group and keep close watch over children. Stay on established hiking trails.

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A MOUNTAIN LION:

- Do not approach, give mountain lion a way to escape.
- Do not run, crouch down or bend over.
- Without bending over, pick up children, so they do not run.
- Make eye contact, do not turn away.
- Make yourself look bigger (raise your arms) and speak in a firm, loud voice.
- Throw stones or branches, and if attacked, fight back with whatever you have at hand.
- For more information about mountain lions, contact the Mountain Lion Preservation Foundation at 916-442-2666 or on the web at www.mountainlion.org

Sightings of mountain lions in Topanga should be reported to Rosi Dagit, Conservation Biologist for the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains at 310-455-1030.



BOBCATS. Bobcats are more common to our area than the mountain lion because they are much smaller and require less territory to survive. As more humans encroach upon the bobcat's territory, we will occasionally have encounters with them. Bobcats are usually shy and elusive, so encounters will most likely be brief. Problems can be avoided by keeping dog and cat food inside, keeping small animals indoors, especially at night, and by making sure outdoor animal enclosures are strong and secure. Again, do not feed wildlife. *Sightings should be reported to the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains at 310-455-1030.*

INSECTS.

YELLOW JACKETS. Yellow jackets are common throughout the canyon and will bite and sting repeatedly when disturbed, stepped on with bare feet or when caught in clothing. They have yellow and black stripes on their bodies and are smaller than wasps, hornets or honeybees. Yellow jackets are attracted by a wide variety of foods including meat, anything sweet including fruit, fruit juice, soda, cake, candy, etc. and some perfumes and suntan lotions. They usually nest in the ground or in old tree stumps, so it is important to make sure that they are not present in an area where children or companion animals are playing. They are most active in the summer and early fall.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Remove items that attract yellow jackets, particularly fruit that has fallen from a tree. When eating outside, keep food and drinks covered; do not drink from an open soda can in the summer – yellow jackets like to climb inside for a sip.
- Non-toxic traps that can be hung from trees and that use highly effective odor attractants are available at most garden-supply stores.

FIRE ANTS. Red Imported Fire Ants have recently been found in California. Extremely aggressive, they will repeatedly sting anything that disturbs them. They live in colonies that first nest in the ground and then create a mound of dirt over the nest. Mounds can grow up to 18 inches high.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Wear closed-toe shoes, socks and gloves whenever working in infested areas.
- Teach children about fire ants and their potential hazard.
- Do not enclose or tether animals near fire ant mounds.
- To help stop the spread of fire ants, avoid moving soil or any other infested item from your property.
- For more information, contact the West Vector Control District at 310-915-7370.

AFRICANIZED HONEYBEES. Africanized honeybees, also called “killer bees,” arrived in southern California in 1994. Although the bees’ “killer” reputation has been exaggerated, they are less predictable and more defensive than European honeybees, which look identical. They are more likely to defend a greater area around their colony, and they respond faster in greater numbers, although each bee can sting only once. *See remedy options listed above under “Honey Bees.”*

- For more information about Africanized honeybees, contact the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains at 310-455-1030.
- For information about compassionate removal and relocation of bees, contact “David the Beeman” at 310-207-1090 or the L.A. Honey Company at 323-264- 2383.

TERMITES. Termites are never good to have near or in a home. They can cause serious structural damage.

REMEDY OPTIONS:

- Have your home professionally inspected for termites every few years. Learn to recognize termites and signs of their presence.
 - Several non-toxic abatement options now exist.
- Note:** *If you must have your house professionally tented, make sure any animals that may be nesting under eaves or any other areas of the house are not present. Tenting is best done in the fall.*



HOW YOU CAN HELP LOCAL WILDLIFE

- *Learn about the natural and human history of the Santa Monica Mountains by reading and attending interpretive programs. Visit the Topanga State Park Nature Center and the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (see phone numbers below).*
- *Learn about how land is acquired and protected. Contact the National Park Service, California State Parks, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains and other local environmental organizations (see phone numbers below). Urge your government representatives to protect areas in and around the Santa Monica Mountains.*
- *Practice backyard conservation by creating habitats using native plants. Wherever possible, link your yard to surrounding wildlands and avoid the use of pesticides, herbicides and other toxic materials. Contact the National Wildlife Federation Backyard Habitat Program at 703-486-6000, www.nwf.org*
- *Practice low-impact hiking by staying on established trails. Pack out everything you pack in, and pick up trash left behind by others.*
- *If you come upon a young animal and believe it may be orphaned, wait. Often the mother is away foraging for food. Unless the “coast is clear,” she will not return for her baby, so stay away from the animal. Unless the young animal appears in distress or very sick, leave it for 24 hours. If after 24 hours, the animal is still there and appears cold and hungry, call the California Wildlife Center at 310-457-WILD.*
- *If you find a truly orphaned or injured wild animal or bird, contain it, keep it warm, dark and quiet until you can get to a wildlife care center – do not try to give the animal food or liquids without instruction from an expert.*
- *When carrying out yard work where you are disturbing a lot of brush and tree limbs, be aware that you may encounter a den or birds nest. Be careful as you go and listen for the chirping of chicks or other signs that wildlife is present. It is best to do tree work in the fall, when hatchlings or other young animals have matured and moved on.*
- *Dead, dying and hollow trees can serve as valuable habitat for wildlife. Unless they pose a threat to safety, consider leaving standing dead or dying trees in your yard. Also, allow some leaf litter to accumulate on the ground.*
- *Most baby bird injuries are caused by domestic animals. If you have nests or fledgling birds on your property, monitor your dogs and cats, especially during spring and summer months.*
- *Dogs and cats should never be free to harass or kill our local wildlife. Walk your dog on a leash and never allow him or her to roam freely in parkland or wilderness areas. For their own safety and that of native birds, lizards and other small animals, cats should be kept indoors or in a secure indoor/outdoor enclosure.*
- *Sometimes people have good intentions, but actually do something harmful to wildlife. For example, if you set up a hummingbird feeder, once birds start visiting it regularly, it's important to change the solution at least every 2 to 3 days and keep the feeder filled. Birds may come to depend on it and can suffer or die if the food source disappears. It is better to consider wildflowers that attract hummingbirds for briefer periods.*
- *When storing empty containers of any kind, especially outdoors, store them upside down. There are at least two reasons for this. One is that small animals like lizards can become trapped and die slowly of starvation and dehydration. The other is that water can collect in an empty container, creating a breeding ground for mosquitoes.*
- *Before disposing of them, cut plastic rings, six-pack holders and other similar product packaging to prevent birds and other animals from becoming entangled in them.*
- *If you use party balloons outdoors, don't let them escape. Birds and other animals can become entangled in string or accidentally ingest the deflated balloon.*
- *Outdoor lighting can have a negative impact on local wildlife. It's best to turn outdoor lights off at night or have them connected to a motion sensor.*

A Word About Turtles

The Western Pond Turtle is the only native turtle that lives in California and is the top aquatic animal living in Topanga Creek. They are listed as a “species of special concern” in California due to their declining population as a result of habitat loss and predators. The turtle population in Topanga is important both locally and regionally, and a study has recently begun to provide information that will help protect their chances of survival in the future. As a wildlife viewer, please:

- *Watch from a distance. Don't scare turtles from basking areas.*
- *Don't create a path to the creek's edge. Raccoons, skunks, cats and other predators will use your trail to hunt for nest sites.*
- *Don't dump crayfish, bullfrogs or non-native turtles in the creek.*
- *Report sightings of Western Pond Turtles, non-native turtles or bullfrogs to the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains at 310-455-1030.*

Help keep Topanga Creek clean! Keep your septic system in good repair, use safe soaps and never drain greywater directly into the creek.



SUGGESTED READING*

Wild Neighbors: The Humane Approach to Living with Wildlife, by the Humane Society of the United States, www.hsus.org

Living with Wildlife, by Diana Landau and Shelley Stump. The California Center for Wildlife. Sierra Club Books, 213-387-4287.

Bats in Your Belfry: Tips on Co-Existing with Urban Wildlife, Booklet published by The Fund for Animals Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, 619-789-2324.

Outdoors: Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area Quarterly Calendar of Events and Programs, National Park Service, 804-370-2301

Children's Reading:

Grandmother Oak, by Rosi Dagit

Charlotte's Web, by E.B. White

The Old Lady Who Liked Cats

Children's Publications: ***Ranger Rick, Owl, Kid's Discover, National Geographic World Your Big Backyard***

*Check with your local librarian for additional reading material.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Wildlife Care and Rehabilitation

California Wildlife Center, 310-457-WILD

EarthWays of Malibu, Rebecca Dmytryk, 310-238-2339

Topanga Animal Rescue, Susan Clark, 310-455-7268

Agoura Animal Shelter, 310-991-0071

Parks

Topanga State Park, 310-455-2465

California State Park Service, 818-880-0350

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, National Park Service, 805-370-2300

Resource Conservation

Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, 310-455-1030

Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, 310-589-3200

Environmental / Animal Protection Organizations

Local:

Surfrider Foundation, Malibu Chapter, 310-451-1010

Whale Rescue Team, 310-455-2729

Heal the Bay, 310-453-0395

Tree People, 818-753-4600

National:

Audubon Society, 818-347-3205

Sierra Club, 213-387-4287

The Nature Conservancy, 310-478-8426

National Wildlife Federation, www.nwf.org

Fund for Animals, 760-789-2324

Humane Society of the United States, www.hsus.org

Education

Topanga Canyon Docents, 310-534-9400

Topanga State Park Nature Center, 310-455-2465

Resource Conservation of the Santa Monica Mountains, 310-455-1030

Topanga Creek Watershed Committee, 310-455-1030 x211, www.topangaonline.com/twc

Topanga Online, www.topangaonline.com/nature/wildlife (Sensitive Species Database)

Nature of Wildworks, 310-455-0550

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 213-763-3466

Wildlife Questions or Concerns

Rosi Dagit, RCDSMM Conservation Biologist, 310-455-1030

Susan Clark, Topanga Animal Rescue, 310-455-7268

Jim Dine, Mammalogy Dept., Natural History Museum of L.A. County, 213-763-3369

California Department of Fish and Game, 213-620-4700

Bats

Jackie Safanov, 310-455-3157

Rosi Dagit, 310-455-1030

Birds

Gerry Haigh, 310-455-1696

Susan Clark, Topanga Animal Rescue, 310-455-7268

Bees

David the Beeman, 310-207-1090

L.A. Honey Company, 323-264-2383

Rattlesnakes

John MacNeil (capture and release), 310-455-1766

Topanga Fire Department, 310-455-1766

Companion Animals

Animal Clinic of Topanga, 310-455-1330



Contributors:

Writing and Research: Mary Bloom, Woody Hastings

Research and Editing: Dona Christianson

Consultants: Rosi Dagit, Jim Dine, Susan Clark, Gerry Haigh, Jackie Safanov

Photography: Deborah Lindquist-High, Nadine Bozon-Vialle, Thomas Chandler

Other Contributors: Peter Wallerstein, Leigh Bloom

Desktop Publishing: Topanga Mail & Message Co.

Dedicated to:

Petie and all the wonderful wild critters of Topanga Canyon.



*"In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create,
but by what we refuse to destroy."*

-John C. Sawhill (1936-2000), president
The Nature Conservancy, 1990-2000