

Officials warn residents to avoid displaced wildlife

By Zain Shauk

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FOOTHILLS — Authorities are cautioning residents to beware of animals fleeing burned areas of the Angeles National Forest and moving into neighboring communities.

With more than a quarter of the forest burned, animals displaced by the Station fire may find their way into nearby streets and homes as they search for food and comfortable surroundings, officials said.

“If you see a wild animal, be safe and keep your distance and keep your pets away from it until it leaves,” Jonathan Fielding, Los Angeles County’s director of public health, said in a statement.

Wild animals moving out of the forest may have been frightened by flames and could be easily agitated as they venture into unfamiliar territories, said Bruce Quintelier, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service.

Small animals, like rabbits, skunks and rodents, will be the most likely candidates to make more frequent appearances in communities, Quintelier said. Deer may also become more visible, he added.

Large predators like mountain lions and bears will also more likely to venture into communities, but not as much as smaller animals, he said.

Wild animals, large or small, have the potential to attack or carry diseases so residents are advised to avoid contact, Quintelier said.

While an attack is unlikely, in a confrontation with a large predator, residents should not run away or crouch, potentially mimicking prey, but instead should stand tall and back away slowly, he said.

“Be wise about what you’re doing,” he said.

The biggest safety threats the animals may pose, if any, will be for small pets, experts said.

Bears, mountain lions or bobcats could roam into neighborhoods looking for food, while owls and hawks might also be circling overhead more frequently after struggling to find prey in the depleted forest, said Dr. Tom Black, of the Crescenta Valley Veterinary Hospital.

“I would certainly be vigilant at dusk, dawn or after dark,” Black said.

Small children should also be watched after as even small wild animals could carry dangerous diseases, he said.

Wild rodents could also carry fleas that might carry a plague-like virus that is easily transferable to other animals, he said.

Although the threats will not be severe, residents should be mindful of the dangers the wild refugees may present in typically holed up suburban communities, Quintelier said.

“It isn’t like you’re going to see mass migrations all at one time into a neighborhood,” he said. “There may be some more activity, but as things settle down they will return back to where their habitat normally was, provided there’s a source of food there for them.”

Still, residents should be attentive, particularly with the most vulnerable of targets for large predators, Black said.

“The main thing would be the safety of small children and pets from the larger predators, and I think vigilance certainly at all times now because there are going to be some hungry predators out there,” he said.