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Conservation and Attractions

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Those of a possum are by far the largest, being about 2cm long and about 1cm wide. In comparison, those of a rat or mouse can be from less than 0.5cm to just over 1cm long. The lingering smell of rats and mice is quite different to that of a possum, and possums do not chew on electrical wiring as rats and mice often do.

As possums are territorial, the removal of one possum from the roof will only leave a vacant possum-smelling space for another to take up residence. By careful observation at night it should be possible to find the place that a possum uses to enter a roof, and once this has been found, possums can be discouraged from taking up residence.

### Detering possums

Block all potential access points to the roof except for the entry point that a possum has been observed using. Useful materials include sheet metal, vinyl, wood or wire netting with a mesh size smaller than 20mm, which should be fitted securely and snugly to prevent the animal from getting a claw hold and lifting the cover off the hole. Bricks are not recommended, as possums are strong and have been known to loosen mortar or move loose bricks aside. It may be necessary to trim or remove trees providing access as well.

After dusk the possum will leave the roof to go in search of food, at which stage the remaining entry point can be permanently blocked. A feeding platform may be useful for encouraging possums to a convenient observation point to confirm that a possum has left the roof and it is safe to block off the last entry point. Pieces of fruit can be provided sparingly and only while attempting to exclude a possum from the roof.

Alternatively, fit a one-way flap made out of metal or perspex to allow the possum out but not in. Cover the flap surrounds with metal to prevent possum claws from gripping and lifting the flap. If the possum proves to be elusive, contact your local Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) office for advice.

To prevent access to the roof, sheet metal can be rolled into collars approximately 60cm wide, and placed around the trunks of nearby trees at a height of about 60cm to prevent possums from climbing them. Branches overhanging the house can be trimmed.

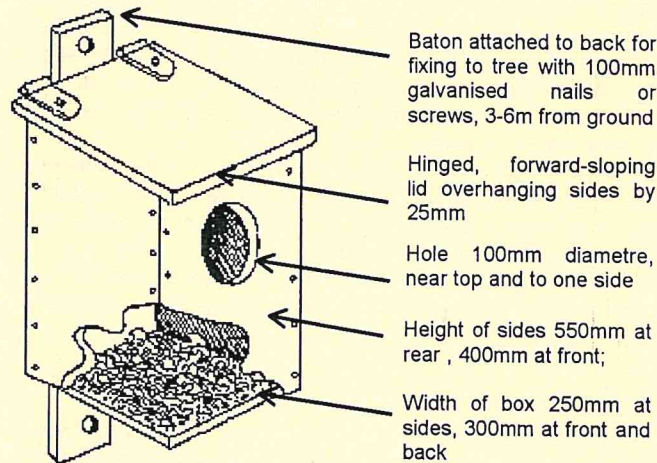
Specially designed waterproof nest boxes can be placed in trees around the area to provide alternative nests or to encourage possums to the area. These may be simple hollow logs with one end blocked, or wooden box constructions, placed about four metres above the ground, perhaps in the fork of a tree, but facing south away from the sun. If available, possum droppings and

nest material can be placed in the nest box to make it more inviting to possums. Taping a cockroach strip inside the nest box lid during spring will prevent invasion by bees.

The relocation of possums to other sites is not an acceptable option since studies have shown the survival rate of relocated possums is very low. Most are killed by foxes and dogs or hit by cars while crossing roads in search of a suitable territory.

The trapping and removal of possums from buildings should be a last resort, and licenses are required from CALM for all such activities. If there appears to be no other alternative than to trap and remove a possum, contact your nearest CALM office to discuss the options available.

### A basic possum nest box design

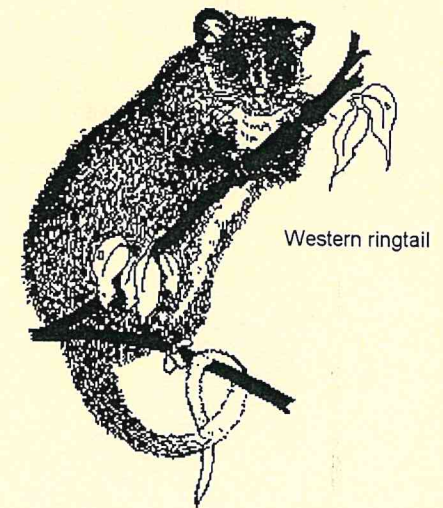


### References

- "Wildlife Notes" No.4 (January 1997) *Nest Boxes for Wildlife*. Land for Wildlife Western Australia.

Prepared by C. Kemp & E. Bramwell, Land for Wildlife  
 Possum artwork by Louise C. Burch, Graphic Designer  
 Department of Conservation and Land Management WA, July 1999.  
 Revised November 2004.

# Living with Possums



A joint initiative of the Land for Wildlife scheme and the Department of Conservation and Land Management Western Australia, July 1999.





## Living with possums

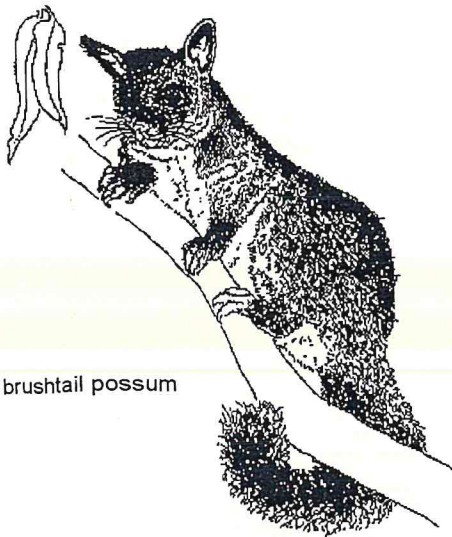
The common brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) and, to a lesser extent, the western ringtail possum (*Pseudocheirus occidentalis*) are two native mammals that may be encountered in and around urban areas in the southwest of Western Australia. The western ringtail is listed as a specially protected (threatened) species under the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950.

The western ringtail is endemic to the southwest of Western Australia and mostly restricted to coastal areas between Albany and Bunbury (see map), while the common brushtail possum is found in a wide range of habitats throughout Australia.

### Biology

The western ringtail is about the size of a small cat, with soft, short fur of a charcoal grey colour, and a paler underbelly. The common brushtail possum is larger and usually silver grey in colour though this can vary to charcoal grey or brown. One obvious difference between the two species is the tail. The western ringtail has a long and slim tail with white at the end, while the common brushtail has a bushy tail with a furless strip underneath, and a black or white tip.

Possums are mainly nocturnal, resting in tree hollows or similar refuges during the day and emerging shortly after sunset to forage for food.



Common brushtail possum

### Diet

Possums are mainly herbivorous, eating leaves, fruits and blossoms. In natural circumstances the diet of the western ringtail consists mostly of the foliage of trees including peppermint (*Agonis flexuosa*), jarrah and marri, while the common brushtail possum enjoys a diet of eucalypt, wattle and mistletoe foliage. In urban areas both species will readily accept fruit (apples, bananas, oranges, etc) and many types of flowering garden plants, with a particular liking for rose buds and shoots. It is quite common for possums to rapidly defoliate garden trees, in some cases almost eating them bare.

### Habitat

Possums are strongly territorial, with males actively defending their home ranges using a range of guttural noises and by marking boundaries with scent glands on their chin, chest and near the anus. Territory size is generally determined by the availability of food and suitable nesting site hollows or dreys. A territory may be as small as an area of about 50 metres radius from a central location, and may contain a number of nesting sites. The territory of a possum may be home also to an adult female, and juveniles of both sexes.

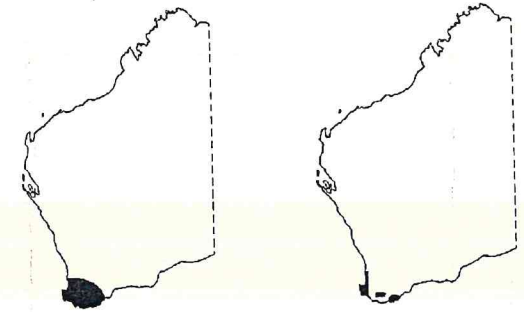
Common brushtail possums are solitary by nature, although during breeding season it is possible to see a pair together. In urban areas possums may congregate in parks and gardens while feeding on food scraps.

Western ringtails are quite social, and up to eleven may occupy a home range that overlaps with the home ranges of other possums.

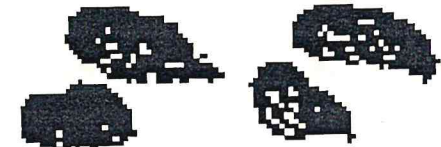
### Breeding

Female possums breed once a year from the age of twelve months, usually at the end of autumn, although common brushtail possums have been known to breed twice a year, with a minor second breeding season in spring. Males are very active and mobile in this season, searching for mates from about April onwards. This is often noticeable by a marked increase in the number of roadkill animals observed at this time.

### Former (left) and current (right) distribution of the western ringtail



### Signs of possums



Brushtail possum scats (actual size)

A female will produce a single young (or occasionally twins) after a gestation period of about three weeks. The young possum spends about five months in the mother's pouch before riding on the mother's back for another two months until it is weaned, after which it leaves its parents to find its own territory.

### Living with possums

Possums have adapted well to living in and around urban areas, and often take refuge in roof cavities instead of tree hollows.

This is usually an annoying experience, since possums are very noisy at night and over long periods may produce unpleasant odours and urine stains in the ceiling. However rats and mice may also inhabit roof spaces and create a disturbance, especially during the winter months. If the roof cavity is accessible, the easiest way to determine whether it is a rat, mouse or possum that has taken up residence is to find some droppings.