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COMMON BRUSHTAIL POSSUM

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Trichosorus vulpecula hypoleucus*

IDENTIFICATION: Generally silver-grey above, white to pale grey below. Long oval ears (50 – 60 mm); tail varies from being bushy to sparsely furred with short, terminal, naked area underneath.

Head and Body Length 350 – 550 mm

Tail Length 250 – 400 mm

Weight 1.2 – 3.5 Kg (females) 1.3 – 4.5 Kg (males)

HABITAT: The brushtail possum is known to occupy a variety of habitats from forest and woodlands that provide sufficient trees with hollows, to ground refuges such as hollow logs. Other refuges include rock piles and the burrows of other animals including boodies. On Barrow Island, Western Australia, they live on the ground where there are no trees. In cities, possums often seek shelter, warmth and protection in the dark recesses of buildings. A favoured spot is between the ceiling and the roof and this can be a problem to some people. The brushtail possum remains restricted to tree hollows in areas where foxes occur (see our brochure on living with possums).

DIET: Brushtail possums are herbivores. Leaves comprise the bulk of the diet. Some of the preferred species are very toxic including *Gastrolobium* species in Western Australia and some *Eucalyptus*. The choice of leaves is determined mainly by their nutrient and fibre content and demonstrates a remarkable tolerance to plant toxins. Flowers and fruits form an important component of the diet, particularly in the arid and tropical areas where these foods are essential to successful breeding.

STATUS: Common

INTERESTING FACTS: In most Australian States during the 1800s and early 1900s, large numbers of brushtail possums were killed for their pelts. Their fur is prized for its thickness and warmth. Studies of the behaviour of brushtail possums have shown that about 16 per cent of their time is spent feeding, 30 per cent travelling, 44 per cent sleeping or sheltering, and 10 per cent grooming. In New Zealand the brushtail possum has become a major pest and a host to bovine tuberculosis, but its skin supports a lucrative fur trade.

