

OPOSSUMS FACTS

- Opossums lived during the Age of the Dinosaurs... fossil remains have been found from 70 million years ago! This means that the opossum is part of the Earth's oldest surviving mammal family.
- The opossum doesn't have a permanent "nest" because it is nocturnal and transient. It will spend an average of 2-3 days in the same hideout, then move on. Some weeks later it may return to your place, depending on your hospitality.
- Opossums have soft, rounded opposable thumbs with no fingernails, on their hind feet.
- Opossums do not dig holes, as their paws are very soft and tender, much like a human hand.
- Opossums may drool, growl and show their 50 teeth when frightened, but in reality are placid and prefer to avoid any confrontation.
- They are slow-moving with very sensitive hearing and smell, opossums are not territorial and will adapt to any environment where food, water and shelter exist.
- Opossums do not hang by their tails-the tail stabilizes their position while climbing and walking.
- Besides their natural predators in the wild, humans, cars and cats are the demise for this docile creature. Very few survive to adulthood, and usually live only 1-2 years if they do.
- "Playing Possum" is one of the most effective ways the opossums defends itself. When unable to flee, extreme fear places the opossum into an involuntary coma. They become stiff and their mouths will gape open. This condition will last 40 minutes to 4 hours. Most predators will abandon their attack, once the opossum is thought to be dead.
- Opossums cannot jump. An opossum may get into a trash can only if it has been knocked over by another animal, or if it's against a fence and the opossum drops into it, which can trap the opossum in the trash can. Just tip the can over and eventually the opossum will scramble away.
- Opossum fur coloring is most commonly gray, but can range from white and cinnamon to black.
- Baby opossums are usually born between the months of February and June.



Facts compiled by: The Opossum Society of the U.S., P.O. Box 167, Irvine, CA 92713 (714) 536-3538

Most Common 'Possum Questions & Their Solutions

Remember make some phone calls to your local wildlife agency to get the number of your local wildlife rescue group. This way you will be prepared if you find a possum in need. These are some commonly asked questions.

There is an opossum on my fence: Leave it alone, it will move on. Or, if you have a lot of snails, roaches or crickets, it may drop in for a snack and then leave. Trying to scare it away or push it along with a stick will just make it freeze. Opossums do not like the sound of crumbling plastic bags, try crumbling on to make it hasten away.



My dogs bark at opossums: Dogs are territorial. Without specific obedience training, dogs will bark at anything. Put the dogs up at night to keep them from barking.

There is an opossum in my trash can: Tip the trash can over and walk away, so the opossum can make its escape. In a dumpster, prop a solid branch or something similar so that the opossum can climb out. you must make sure the animal can climb to the branch then to the ground or fence so it can escape.

My dog has cornered an opossum: Bring your dog in the house or garage. The opossum will not try to come after you. Make sure the opossum has made its escape before letting the dog out again.

There is a sick opossum in my yard: Drooling or blowing bubbles is a common defense mechanism which makes an opossum look sick so it won't be eaten. Is it standing or lying on its side? When an opossum is cornered or is in an unusual situation, nothing will budge it. If it is in a crouched position, and there are no visible signs of injury, and it is keeping an eye on you, it is probably just too frightened to move. Walk away and leave it alone. Check on it in 30 minutes. If it is still there, follow instructions for an injured animal.

I have found a dead opossum: Are you sure it is dead? It may be "playing opossum." Is the opossum immobile or nonresponsive to prodding? Are its eyes closed or fixed open? Is blood visible? Place the animal in an open cardboard box in a secluded, shady area of the yard. Make sure it is in a safe place and has a quiet avenue of escape. Don't put the opossum in a plastic bag or in a covered trash can; give it the benefit of the doubt and a chance to revive and survive its attack. Check on the opossum in about 4 hours to see if it has revived. If the animal is alive and injured and it needs a vet, you can call your local rescue group and they can help you further.

There is a opossum swimming in my pool or spa: If it is an adult you can net it and put it in a quiet place on the ground to escape. If it is a baby, under 9 inches, fish it out and wrap it up to keep it warm. Careful, they have teeth. Then call your local rescue group (or me). You may leave a textured hose or towel draped over the side of the pool for the opossum to climb out on its own, just keep an eye on it. It may need your help.

More Commonly Asked Questions...

Characteristics of the Virginia Opossum

- **White Face:** There will be a "widows peak" of dark hair on their forehead and the white face will confirm it is an opossum.
- **50 Teeth:** More teeth than any other mammal. Opening their mouth and showing their teeth "gaping" is a natural defense mechanism. "Gaping" is what babies will do too.
- **Pouch:** That means it is a marsupial, not a rodent. Females carry the young in their pouches like the kangaroo. The opossum is North America's only marsupial.
- **Furless Tail:** The tail is prehensile: it is used as a fifth limb, to help balance or lower to the ground. They do not hang by their tails that is an old wives tail.



There is an opossum in my house: secure your pets in another room. Remove all food sources and packaging. Leave a trail of dry kibble leading from the opossums hiding place to a safe exit. Fruit will work too. Leave all lights at the same level. Sit quietly at a distance, so you can see the opossum leave (should take about 20 minutes).

Trapping an Opossum: Lean an empty wastebasket against something the opossum can climb onto. Put an open can of cat food in the wastebasket. Ripe fruit will do the same trick. The opossum will smell the food and climb in the wastebasket but will not be able to climb back out. Then with the opossum in the wastebasket you can take him/her to a safe area and lay the wastebasket on its side and allow the opossum to escape. Another way is to purchase a "Have a Heart" trap, set the trap in a shady area of your yard and put food and water in the trap and partially cover the trap. As soon as you notice the opossum has been trapped quickly get it to a safe location and open the trap so that the opossum can escape. Sometimes opossums will try to chew out or suffocate in hot weather. The first method is less risky for the opossum.

Mother Opossum with Babies: You will not see opossums being born. At birth 20 can fit into a teaspoon. You will see infant opossums at about three months of age, riding on mothers back or in or near her pouch. If you see a mother with babies, be very quiet, if you spook her she may dash off and drop a baby. She will not come back for it and unless you rescue it, it will perish. If you see a large opossum on the road that has been hit, you can check to see if there are babies still in her pouch or around her body. Often in the spring, mothers who have been hit will still have babies that have survived and can be rescued. If you find babies in the pouch or around her body, keep them warm! They cannot make their own body heat when they are small, so they need your help.



An Opossum in the Yard: Will it harm my children? When an opossum picks a "den" to settle, it finds the deepest, darkest most secluded place as possible. Opossums sleep very soundly and are nocturnal. Both males and females go to a lot of trouble to insulate their nest with leaves, twigs and some nice rags you may have left around. It is highly unlikely that a child will ever reach a sleeping opossum. If children are exploring dark, secluded areas they may run a greater risk of being bitten by a snake or spider.

Are Opossums Rabid?: Opossums are not carriers of rabies, unlike raccoons, fox, bats and skunks. There have been a few cases but it is VERY RARE that an opossum will ever have rabies.

Thank you for your interest in the opossum. Please feel free to email any questions to info@possumrescue.com.