



HUME CITY COUNCIL

Living with wildlife POSSUMS

Brushtail and Ringtail Possums are the only marsupials that have adapted to urban living, with many residents of cities enjoying their presence. These species are nocturnal and require a dark place to rest during the day, with roof cavities often being sufficient in urban areas. All possums require trees for food and shelter.

Ringtail nests (dreys) are spherical, formed with leaf litter and occur in the dense foliage of tall shrubs or trees. Brushtails use no nesting materials, instead they usually inhabit tree hollows, but can also inhabit the roofs of houses. The call of a possum sounds like a guttural coughing noise, as well as hissing and screaming when fighting.

Diet

The Brushtail Possum eats mostly plant material from natives as well as introduced plants, especially leaves, flowers and fruit, but will also eat bird eggs and chicks. Ringtail Possums are strictly vegetarian and will eat most plants.

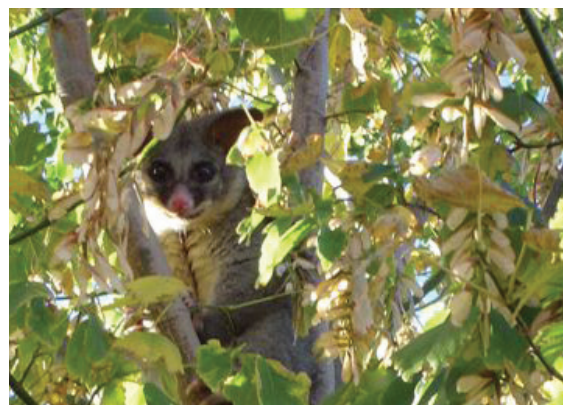
Problems

In urban areas Brushtail Possums may find shelter in the roof cavity of a house, a garage or a shed during the day. This can generate a lot of noise, especially when possums are squabbling or walking about. This can create anxiety for residents, particularly when it occurs at night or early in the morning.

In rare cases, possums can damage the plaster on roofs when they fight. Occupying roofs, they can also cause a build-up of urine stains and droppings which can be unsightly and create an odour.

In backyards possums can defoliate trees as they feed on the same plant for many days or weeks. They can also trigger dogs to bark, which can be a frustration for residents at night.

Possums have also been known to cause blackouts by short-circuiting power-lines.





Council's advice

Excluding possums from food sources in the backyard will likely deter possums from visiting the area, for example, netting fruit trees.

Collars can be placed around tree trunks to prevent possums from browsing. These collars need to be at least 60cm's from the ground, and 60cm's wide. You must also ensure that the possum cannot jump to the tree from the canopy of another tree, or a structure nearby.

Possums can get into the roof through loose tiles or roofing iron, broken eaves and holes in the timber or brickwork. You can remove the problem by blocking off these holes. The entry point can be located by watching at dusk where the possum emerges, or you could inspect the roof for signs of scratches, staining or hairs. It is advised that you block these areas off with a one-way flap so the possum can get out, but not in again. These flaps are easier to construct than setting a trap.

A high percentage of people who think they have a possum in their roof, have in fact a rat. Rats make rapid gnawing sounds and high pitched squeaks. If unsure, contact a wildlife handler to assess the problem.

Residents are also advised to have their dogs trained not to bark at possums. Your local vet can assist with recommending books or dog trainers.

Do not feed possums at home or in parks, as this attracts possums to the area and will cause excessive defoliation of plants.

Odour repellents found at supermarkets and nurseries can sometimes be effective at deterring possums from entering roof cavities.

- Do not attempt to trap possums as this is illegal for anyone who does not contain a license or permit. Trapping possums is also ineffective because there are always young possums searching for empty territory to inhabit and the cavity will likely be re-occupied by another individual.
- DSE can provide more detailed information to residents on methods to reduce nesting in buildings, such as deterrents and effectively sealing cavities.

**For more information about living with wildlife
contact Hume's Coordinator, Land and Biodiversity
on 9205 2200 or visit www.hume.vic.gov.au/wildlife**

