

Living With Possums – FACT SHEET



Long Grass Nature Refuge

605 Spinach Creek Rd, Fordsdale via Gatton Qld 4343

If you need assistance with native wildlife call **(07) 4697 5122**

This fact sheet contains information sourced from members of Tweed Valley Wildlife Carers, members of other groups, independent advice, and research.



Photo: Courtesy W.A.R.P
Young Common Brushtail Possum



Hand reared Mountain Brushtail Possum

Why do Possums move into our homes?

There are two types of Possum we usually come across in the urban or rural environment: The shy and social Ringtail Possum (below), and the cheeky, bold, and territorial Brushtail Possum (above). It is the more often observed Brushtail who sometimes takes up residence in our homes. So why do they do this?



Ringtail Possum

All species of Possum are nocturnal. The Ringtail possum usually builds a nest or 'drey' of twigs and leaves in dense foliage a few metres above the ground, and seldom enters house roofs. Brushtails make their home in naturally occurring tree hollows. They sleep there all day, and forage at night. Ringtails do not depend on tree hollows, whereas Brushtails do.

As we've cleared the bush to make way for housing developments, we plant houses and imported trees. We leave very few old trees with hollows behind, and the possums, (who were there first) have nowhere to go. They slowly get evicted.

Brushtails however are very adaptable, and sometimes solve their own housing problem. They simply move into ours. And, that's where the problem begins. So many people love possums, (when they are outside) but when they move in even the most ardent nature lover gets a bit frazzled. The comings and goings of a large Brushtail in the

roof can, at 1 am, sound a bit like a herd of cattle break dancing above our heads. Not to mention the damage to ceiling or wiring.

So what can we do?

Trapping and Removal doesn't work..

For a number of reasons:

- It seldom solves the problem, since another possum usually moves in to occupy the newly vacated territory in your roof.
- Relocated possums may displace other wildlife, such as parrots, owls or gliders, from hollows.
- Relocated possums are at high risk of being killed by cars, foxes or dogs; they will battle with the local possums for a den site. All possums, like all other native animals are protected, under the *Wildlife Act 1975*. They must not be harmed in any way. Shooting or poisoning is completely illegal.
- Research has shown that nearly 100% of relocated possums DIE within a very short space of time.

There is however, a solution

Make or buy a nest box, and install it in your garden as an alternate den site for the possum. (See our '[how to build a nestbox for brushtail possums](#)' fact sheet). This is very unlikely to attract other brushtails. Possums are very territorial. When your roof dwelling possum adopts the nestbox, it is likely to keep all others away from your garden and roof.

If the possum has built a nest in your roof, locate this (at night) and remove it. Place it inside the new possum-box to encourage it to move in to the new location. You could also try putting a little fruit (such as apple or banana) into the possum-box to encourage it to investigate.

Block access to your roof (when the possum is out) by placing collars made from 50 cm wide sheet iron, around the trunks of trees giving access to the roof. Also consider lopping branches, which lead to the roof.

Spread camphor blocks or mothballs in the roof (not both) to repel the possum - they really dislike these smells. You can also place a light in the roof and leave it on for three days (and nights). The combination of light, smells, and an attractive alternative home, should hopefully do the trick.

Once you are SURE the possums have left your roof, block any known entrance points and wipe around these points with household bleach to remove possum scent. Ringtail possums also may choose your roof as housing because natural housing is in short supply. We also have a ringtail nest box fact sheet.

If you decide to have a possum removed

You need to put a possum-box up first. Contact the us to advise you of the contact details for a possum catcher in your area. The possum trap can then be set. Once caught it is up to you to block all entry points.

In almost all cases, the trapped possum will be released on your property at dusk, so it is important to have blocked up all entry points, and to provide the alternate 'lodgings'. One advantage is that the possum, once settled into its new possum box, will claim your backyard as territory and keep other possums away from your house.

Possums on our roads

Unfortunately many possums die on our roads each night. There are many that we see, but there are also many that we don't see. THE YOUNG JOEYS THAT OFTEN LAY UNSEEN IN THE POUCH.

These little animals can quite literally live for days in a dead mothers' pouch, slowly dying of dehydration and hunger on the side of the road. Apart from driving more 'wildlife friendly', please stop and check the pouches of dead marsupials, and then remove the animal well away from the road. Dead animals tend to attract predators, which may become traffic statistics themselves.

If you do find a joey, please do not offer it anything to eat or drink. It has one primary requirement - warmth. Wrap it in a beanie, cloth bag, sock or towel, no synthetic material please. Put it next to your skin, and contact us quickly.