

Brushtail Possum

Trichosurus vulpecula

At a Glance...

Size:

Roughly the size of a domestic cat. Up to 550mm long, with tail length of up to 400mm. Weighs between 1.2kg – 3.5kg.

What It Eats:

Leaves, buds, flowers, fruits, insects, grubs, moths, birds' eggs and baby birds.

Life Span:

Average life span is 6-7 years but with road sense and luck, up to 11 years!

Habitat:

Forests and woodlands along the east coast and inland areas along tree lined rivers and creeks. In cities and towns they favour rooves and chimneys.

Threats:

Cars and dogs are the greatest threats. Dingos, powerful owls, snakes and foxes can be a threat in rural areas.

What Is a Brushtail Possum?

Whether thumping across corrugated iron rooves, sheltering in ceilings or navigating their way across overhead wires, Brushtail Possums are one of the most common native animals in Australia.

These small mammals live in forests and woodlands and like many Australian mammals; they are marsupials, meaning they carry their young in a pouch. They are the size of a domestic cat with a black bushy tail, silver-grey coat, large



pointy ears and snout, pink nose and long whiskers. In the past, Brushtail Possums were hunted extensively for their fur.

Brushtail Possums are agile climbers using their sharp claws, hand like back feet for grasping and strong tail for curling around branches. Their sharp claws are also useful for combing their fur. Whilst known for their inquisitive, shy nature, they are quite vocal and usually communicate with a hiss, cough or scream.

Where Does a Brushtail Possum Live?

The Brushtail Possum lives throughout mainland Australia, Tasmania and Kangaroo Island. They prefer open eucalypt forests and woodlands, although they are also found in thick forests in wet areas. Many Brushtail Possums have also adapted to city life, living in residential gardens, ceilings and roofs.



The Junior Ranger Way

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Brushtail Possums are nocturnal; they spend the evenings eating and moving from tree to tree and across the ground, and they sleep during the day.

What Does a Brushtail Possum Eat?

Brushtail Possums are mainly plant eaters (herbivores) consuming leaves, buds, flowers and fruits. At times they will also eat insects, grubs, moths, bird eggs and baby birds.

A Brushtail Possum's Family Life

The main breeding time for the brushtail possums is autumn, although some breeding does occur during spring.

The female Brushtail Possum has a forward-facing pouch containing two nipples and breeds after she reaches one-year old. Brushtail Possums commonly producing a single young per year.

Males mates with several different females each season. Courtship takes place for a period of 30-40 days prior to mating. Following mating, the female gives birth to a single baby after 17 days (gestation period). The young then live in the mother's pouch for 4-5 months attached to one teat. They spend a further 1-2 months suckling and riding on the mother's back before being fully weaned.

Most survive their time in the pouch, but many die when they're 6-18 months of age when they leave their parents home territory to set up their own.

Brushtail Possums generally lead a solitary life. They stay within their home range which they mark out by coating tree branches with a scent released from a gland on their chest. Fights between adult possums are rare; however young possums may be attacked if they try to take over an adult's range.

Common predators include cars and dogs in urban areas, and dingos,

powerful owls, snakes and foxes in rural areas.

Fascinating Fact:

The Brushtail Possum is tolerant to many plant toxins – several of their favourite trees are poisonous to most other animals.

Although the common Brushtail Possum is the most abundant and widely distributed of all the large Australian possums, it now occupies only 37% of its former range and is now missing from large areas of Central and Western Australia.

Want to Know More?

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au> (search: Brushtail Possum)