



**Brushtail Possum**  
(*Trichosurus vulpecula*)

**T**he brush tailed possum like its close relative the ring tailed possum, is widespread in Australia however it is a major pest since it was introduced into New Zealand.

It is an arboreal marsupial.  
(living in trees).

The brush tailed possum is one of seven species and is about the size of a cat. It has a pointy snout and a pink nose. Its whiskers are long. They can grow to as big as 550mm long plus a tail which is another 250-400mm long. The tail is prehensile and assists the sharp claws in climbing trees. They are furry and those in Tasmania are furrer as they have adapted to the colder climate. They are usually black, grey or the

smaller Queensland variety is sometimes copper coloured. Such colour variations have been seen also in Tasmania and the image is of a pale copper coloured brushtail.

These possums live in gum trees, their nests usually hidden away in the forks of branches. They become quite used to suburban life, and those Australians with corrugated iron roofs near gum trees will hear them thumping across the roof usually soon after dark and just before dawn. Or if you have a pergola you can watch the entire tribe wend their way across to feed on something through the night. They will try to nest in the ceiling if there is any gap or opening. Sometimes but not often, they get into a house by falling down a chimney. Don't try to catch such a possum or you will have no ornaments left and you may be ornamented with large scratches. Rather open a clear way out and let it, with gentle persuasion, find the back door. They can be a nuisance in the orchard as they will nibble at any fruit. The flower garden is also attractive and there are many reports of rose buds being amongst their favourites. They use their front paws to hold and to help pick fruit and leaves. They will leave small twigs and branches strewn on the ground below. Their faeces are about 2.5 cms long as just thicker than a pencil. They are green-khaki in colour. They can be a mess on the path and a health hazard if washed off your roof into drinking water supplies.

Preventative measures can include rubbing the trunks of fruit trees with blood and bone, and likewise for roses. Or build a large cage over your garden. It like any fencing must be well constructed and the netting made very tight or your possums will get to your fruit before you do! Apart from thumping on the roof they also can be quite noisy as they call to each other. It is a low throaty sound, like some

machine being wound up. In parks and gardens trees that need protection will often be encircled by a band of hard clear perspex or metal about a metre wide. The possums can't get a grip and so the young foliage is protected. Possums are protected in most areas and professional trappers can catch them on your property. Research has demonstrated that if they are released somewhere in the bush, they will hardly survive for a week. The local possums will not tolerate intruders. These possums mark their territory with scent from special glands in the chests. Aboriginal people in Victoria and Tasmania sometimes used cloaks of possum skin to ward off cold winds and rain. The skins were sewn together to make a very effective garment. The young are usually born at the beginning of winter after a gestation period of about 17 days. When born the young possum makes its way to the pouch and attaches itself to a teat. It remains in the pouch for the next five months. By then winter has gone and it will venture out and climb on its mother's back. It will travel like this for the next two months. Young females start to breed at about one year old.



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**SEE OVER**

**How to Eliminate Rats and Mice but  
not Wildlife**



# ELIMINATE RATS AND MICE, NOT WILDLIFE

Rats and mice are not good house guests. They will eat practically anything, and their excreta contaminate what they leave behind. They can spread diseases and other pests (such as fleas) which can affect both humans and animals, and they cause tremendous damage to houses and property. Commonly used anticoagulant rodenticides, however, can take a terrible toll on wildlife: birds of prey, possums, and household pets which prey on animals affected by these poisons can suffer from secondary poisoning, which causes internal hemorrhaging and a slow, painful death. While it is sometimes necessary to use poisons in the interests of human health, there are other options which should be explored before we introduce toxins into our environment. Rats and mice move in because they are seeking food, shelter and breeding sites. By denying them these things, we can make the first and most important move towards getting rid of them. Tidy up. Long grass, weeds, overgrown gardens, timber, sheet metal, cluttered sheds and junk piles provide the perfect environment for rats and mice to flourish. Animal food like bird seed or poultry feed should be stored in airtight, rodent-proof containers (ie: something that can't be chewed through) to make it unavailable to your unwelcome visitors. Trapping should be undertaken with care. Traps should never be set where children, pets, wildlife or domestic animals can be injured by them. Set traps in a safe, covered spot. Two of the most effective baits to use are peanut butter or pumpkin seeds. Although baits containing anticoagulants like Warfarin and Bromadioline or Brodifacoum are readily available from your local council or supermarket, they take three to ten days to kill the animal by way of internal bleeding, and during this time, the affected rat or mouse may be taken by a bird, a domestic cat or a dog. Depending on the number of animals preyed upon, the predator then becomes ill, begins to bleed internally from its liver, and unless urgent veterinary attention is provided, may die. Many of our magnificent native raptors, owls and possums suffer this horrible fate every year. If the problem is such that you must resort to using a poison -and we would never recommend that you simply tolerate rats and mice, to do so would be to risk your family's health. Please consider selecting a COUMATETRALYL based poison like **RACUMIN**, which is also readily available from shops and is about the same price as the other kinds of baits. While toxic, COUMATETRALYL DOES NOT ACCUMULATE UP THE FOOD CHAIN in the same way as Warfaran, Bromadioline and Brodifacoum, and is far safer for the environment. Whenever you use a poison, always follow the safety precautions on the label, most particularly with to accessibility of bait to children, domestic animals and wildlife. Whether you are using traps, baits or a combination of the two, good placement is essential to effective control of pests. Place traps and baits near nests, or places where the rats or mice take shelter. Rats and mice love to run along skirting boards, under floors and in wall cavities. They like to follow established pathways, and they like dark corners and hidey holes, so always lay your traps or baits near these places for maximum effectiveness. For traps and baits to be effective, the rats and mice must consider them a viable food source, so always tidy up and remove all other food sources first, otherwise the rats and mice may ignore your carefully planned snares and carry on eating your food instead. Give rats and mice time to enter traps and take baits. Mice are curious, and are easily caught. Rats are cautious, wily animals and will take their time about getting used to something before they investigate, so be patient.



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