

Living with possums

Possums are a nocturnal tree dwelling mammal. Possums have adapted to live near humans because urbanisation is affecting their natural habitat. This means we can sometimes see these native animals in our backyards, but they may also cause some unwanted impacts.

Common brushtail (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) and common ringtail (*Pseudocheirus peregrinus*) possums are the 2 species South Australians will most likely encounter in our natural and urban environments.



The common brushtail possum has large, pointed ears and a bushy black tail. (Photo: Martin Stokes)



The common ringtail possum has small round ears and a thin, white-tipped tail that it keeps coiled when not using. (Photo: Martin Stokes)

Brushtails are about 1.2 – 4.5 kg in size. They are omnivorous (eating both plants and animals) feeding on leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds and small invertebrates. They rest during the day in tree hollows or other dark cavities, including in built structures.

Ringtails are smaller than brushtails, around 700 – 900 gm in size. They are herbivorous (only eating plants), feeding primarily on eucalyptus leaves and

fresh plant shoots, but they also eat flowers and fruits. They rest during the day in large spherical nests (dreys) in the protected branches of a tree. They may also live in hollows and occasionally use built structures, but they are less likely to do so than brushtails.

You may be lucky enough to encounter some of our other South Australian possum species such as the western pygmy possum, little pygmy possum or eastern pygmy possum. These species are generally not considered to cause impacts to people.

Wild facts

- There are 23 possum species known in Australia, only 2 commonly cause impacts.
- Possums are territorial and will urinate and rub scent glands to mark their territory.
- Brushtail possums use a range of sounds including screams, hisses and growls, especially during mating season.
- Adult ringtail possums often live in family groups, whereas adult brushtail possums are typically solitary.
- The common brushtail possum has been introduced to New Zealand where it is a declared pest.

Possum impacts

Urban expansion has reduced woodland habitats, including old gum trees with hollows, creating a challenge for possums to find natural shelter and food sources. Despite the loss of native habitat, possums are adapting to the urban environment, sometimes seeking shelter in buildings such as residential roof spaces and finding food in people's gardens or in some cases from agricultural orchards or crops.

Although their impacts may be concerning, it's important to remember they are not a pest, but a native animal protected by the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*. There are several options available for managing their impacts without harming possums.



Sometimes possum impacts may be confused with the impacts of rats or mice in your roof or garden, one way to determine this is by identifying the animal's droppings.



(Photo: Tony Crittenden)

Possoms in roofs

If possums, most likely to be brushtails, have found an access point inside your roof or shed, you may be experiencing some impacts such as:

- banging noises inside your ceiling space or walls
- smell or property damage from urine or droppings
- property damage from chewing or scratching.

Top tips for living with possums in roofs

- Exclude possums from entering your roof by blocking entry points, creating one-way exits and trimming overhanging branches.
- Provide wildlife nest boxes in your garden as alternative homes.
- Hire a licenced possum pest controller.
- Apply for a permit to trap and release possums and follow the guidelines. Note that possums may only be trapped inside your roof space or built structure. It is unlawful to:
 - trap a possum in your garden
 - release a possum more than 50 m away from your home.

Possoms in gardens or on farms

If you have noticed that possums are finding shelter and food by living in or visiting your property, you may have experienced some of the following impacts:

- banging noises on top of your roof
- damage to fruit or vegetable crops
- damage to ornamental garden plants and flowers
- damage to germinating crops
- disturbance of dogs or other pets
- safety concerns due to droppings fouling walkways or rainwater stores.

Top tips for living with possums in gardens or farms

- Trim back branches that are overhanging roofs, fences or walkways.
- Restrict access to fruit trees, vegetable or grain crops using 'tree collars', fence barriers or netting.
- Plant alternative food source native plants.
- Plant non-palatable garden plants.
- Use non-toxic natural deterrents or commercial deterrents.
- Remove overnight access to pet food.
- Keep pets inside a night.
- Guard gutters and pipes to exclude droppings.

Note, you can only trap and release possums from your roof space or built structure (not in your garden).

It is only possible to obtain a permit to destroy brushtail possums causing impacts on Kangaroo Island.

Environmental law and possums

Although populations of the common brushtail possum are secure in the Mount Lofty Ranges and Kangaroo Island, this species is listed as a rare in the threatened species schedules of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* (NPW Act). This is because the range and distribution of common brushtail possums in other parts of South Australia has declined.

Possums are protected under the NPW Act. The NPW Act makes it an offence to catch, interfere with, harass or kill protected wildlife, or attempt to do so, without a permit. The ill treatment of animals, is an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act 1985*.

More information

Related factsheets: Possums in your roof, Possums and gardens, Trapping possums.

Visit: www.environment.sa.gov.au

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South Australia

