

Damage Prevention & Control Measures

Do not trap!

Opossums are normally transient animals, staying only 2-3 days in an area before moving on. Removal is neither necessary nor desirable. If opossums were eliminated from an area, the population of pests would proliferate. Opossums serve an important role by controlling the unwanted, harmful pest population around our neighborhoods.

Trapping and relocating opossums does not work.

If you are determined to remove an opossum then encourage it to do so on its own by removing whatever is attracting it to your area. You must determine what is attracting the opossum to your area and remove the attractants or other opossums and animals will come and fill the vacated niche.

Habitat Modification & Exclusion

- Do not leave pet food outside overnight.
- Remove brush or trash piles.
- Store firewood away from buildings or fences and keep the wood at least a foot off of the ground.
- Keep garbage stored correctly in secured cans with tightly fastened lids.
- Close garbage dumpster lids each night to prevent opossums from climbing or falling into the dumpster.
- Regularly check your home for signs that it needs repair and make the repairs quickly.
- Check the integrity of chimney caps and attic vents, and repair any holes.
- Deny access to sheds or to spaces underneath decks or porches. When blocking off these areas, be sure to check that no animals are currently living in there.

Critter Creek Wildlife Station

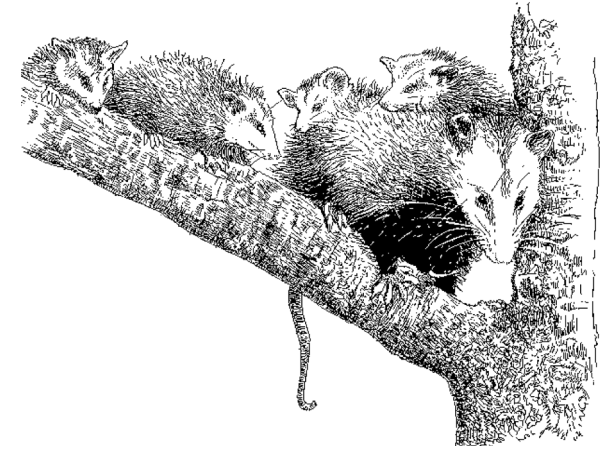
Critter Creek Wildlife Station is a non-profit rehabilitation center for wildlife, located in Squaw Valley, near Kings Canyon National Park. The animals come to us from Fish and Game, veterinarians, humane societies and caring individuals.

In case of a wildlife emergency in the San Joaquin Valley call us at:

559-338-2415

For more information visit our website at
crittercreek.org

Living With Opossums



The opossum is North America's only marsupial. They are the only mammal in the U.S. with a prehensile tail. The opossum is also the only mammal that has four fingers and an opposable thumb on each of its hind feet that works like a human thumb. This makes it possible for the opossum to pick up things or hang onto thin branches much better than most other mammals. The opossum is a cat-sized mammal that resembles a silver rat, with its naked ears, long scaly tail, and silver-tipped fur. The face of the opossum is almost pure white, with four rows of whiskers, a pink nose, and round black eyes. Though they share physical similarities, they are not related to rats.

“Playing Possum”

Perhaps the most intriguing characteristic is the opossum's ability to play dead. When startled, opossums tend to freeze, open their mouth and show you their 50 teeth, drool, and hope you will leave the immediate area so that they can quietly escape. If threatened or attacked, they can literally fall over and play dead. Hence the phrase “playing possum.” In this case the opossum sinks to the ground and curls up on its side while its eyes glaze over, bares its teeth, and lolls its tongue to the side, successfully simulating death.

Diseases

Opossums do not harbor diseases normally found in dogs and cats, such as distemper, parvovirus, or feline hepatitis. All warm-blooded mammals can contract rabies, but opossums are rarely found to be rabid. Scientists believe that the reason for this is because an opossum has a body temperature too low to support the rabies virus.

Benefits

Because opossums are scavengers, they often times get caught “after the fact” and are blamed for damage they did not cause. They have little upper body strength and delicate nails, therefore, just because you

see an opossum, it is unlikely that it tipped over your trashcan or ripped up your lawn.

Opossums rarely cause problems for humans, but often frighten people by their rat-like appearance. Opossums are excellent at rodent and insect control, and being carrion eaters, they help keep roadways and neighborhoods clean. They will remove many pests around your home such as rats, mice, spiders, lizards, snails, cockroaches as well as many other insects, and even snakes. Opossums are more beneficial as scavengers, than harmful for any damage that they may cause. A neighborhood with opossums tends to be considerably cleaner than a neighborhood without them.

When Rescue Is Needed

Opossums hit by a car can have live babies in the pouch, still clinging to her back, or wandering lost and confused up to 50 feet or more away from their dead mother. If there are babies anywhere near, they need to be rescued, or they will die a slow death from freezing, starvation, become prey for any nearby predators, or hit by another car. Contact a wildlife rehabber in your area immediately if you have found babies on or near their dead mother.

Young opossums are remarkably good at

holding on to their mother even as she's climbing, but if they fall off they will make a sneezing, wheezing sound to alert their mother of their position. If you find a baby opossum and do not see its mother anywhere around you need to seek immediate assistance and get the baby warmed so it does not die of hypothermia.

If the babies are old enough, opossums will occasionally leave their young in the den to go out and forage for food. If that den happens to be in your garage or under your tool shed, you may inadvertently doom the babies by closing off their mother's access to them. Or you may frighten her as she's returning to the den, causing her to run off and abandon her babies. If you have found a den of baby opossums but have not seen any sign of their mother, you need to seek the assistance of a wildlife rehabber immediately.

Opossums are very resilient animals, so if you find an adult lying immobile, whether it's in your yard or on the side of the road, its injuries are probably severe enough that it needs to be rescued. Contact a wildlife rehabber in your area immediately for assistance.