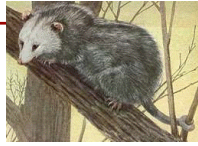

Getting to Know Opossums



Opossums, also known as Virginia opossums, are the only marsupial on this continent.

- 🦉 Generally nocturnal, opossums spend the day in hollow tree trunks, rock crevices, under brush piles, or in burrows.
- 🦉 Opossums inhabit forested or brushy habitats and have adapted well to living close to people in urban and suburban environments.
- 🦉 Although they can climb and are good swimmers, opossums prefer to live on the ground where they amble about slowly. Because of this, they are frequently struck by cars when crossing the street.
- 🦉 Opossums are omnivores. They eat both plant and animal foods and scavenge carrion and garbage.
- 🦉 Opossums are solitary animals who prefer to avoid each other except during breeding season in late winter.

(Continued inside)

Give wildlife a helping hand.

The goal of the Mercer County Wildlife Center is to protect the future of native wildlife species through education, rehabilitation, and release.

You can help the Center meet this goal by donating your time or resources.

Volunteer opportunities:

- 🦉 Animal technicians - Dependable, compassionate people to help feed and administer medications to the animals in our care.
- 🦉 Community outreach volunteers - Enthusiastic people to greet the public at community events, raise funds by selling merchandise, and educate others about wildlife by distributing literature.
- 🦉 Publications - Writers, copy editors, and layout people to help develop our newsletters, brochures, and handouts.
- 🦉 Publicity - Volunteers to write press releases that help spread the word about the Center.
- 🦉 Flea market - People to help run our flea market fund raisers. We also gratefully accept certain donated items.

For more information about these volunteer positions, call the Volunteer Coordinator at (609) 397-8435.

Wish list items:

Caring for the injured, ill, or displaced animals that come through our door involves various supplies, many of which you probably use in your own home. Visit our web site to see our wish list.

Mercer County Wildlife Center




Coexisting with Opossums



The Virginia Opossum is the only marsupial on this continent.

P.O. Box 161
Titusville, NJ 08560
(609) 883-6606

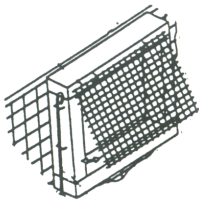
www.mercercounty.org/mcwc/mcwc.htm



Getting to Know Opossums

(Continued)

- Like other marsupials, opossums give birth to almost embryonic young, which crawl into their mother's pouch where they will remain firmly attached to a nipple until they are about 50 days old. When the pouch becomes too crowded, the young venture out and ride on their mother's back.
- Because of their long, naked tails, opossums are sometimes mistaken for rats. Their teeth give them a menacing look, but opossums are actually quite docile and would prefer to avoid contact with humans. When confronted with danger, they do "play opossum," which is a state similar to fainting that can last from under one minute to six hours, and may cause predators to lose interest in the motionless opossum.



One-way Door


Illustration from the Humane Control of Wildlife in Cities and Towns, Humane Society of the U.S.



Coexisting with Opossums

Although opossums sometimes cause damage by overturning garbage, eating fruit or vegetables from the garden, and occasionally getting into a chicken house, they can easily be discouraged through habitat modification. Here are some ideas:

- Secure trash** – Opossums are attracted to food scraps in garbage and compost piles. Dispose of trash in a metal can. Make sure the lid fits tightly and secure it with rope or chain. Do not put food in compost piles; bury food waste in an underground composter or use a lidded worm box instead.
- Avoid leaving pet food outdoors** – If you cannot avoid feeding dogs or cats outdoors, pick up food and water bowls, as well as leftovers and spilled food, as soon as your pets have finished eating.
- Lock pet doors at night** – and do not leave pet food near the opening.
- Eliminate den sites** – Opossums look for convenient den sites, which in developed areas include rock, wood, and brush piles, as well as open spaces under porches, houses, and sheds. Before sealing possible den sites and entries, check first to make sure no animals are



present, especially when there might be young opossums that are old enough to be mobile off their mother's back but are not yet independent. To determine whether there are animals, cover openings near the ground with loose soil and watch to see if an opossum digs out. If you suspect activity in a crawl space or opening in a wall, begin exclusion by sealing all available entries. Leave one hole open and fit it with a one-way door, similar to a cat door, with a hinged flap so that the opossums can escape but not reenter. Leave in place for several days, and continue to watch for activity. When you are certain the animals are gone, close all openings with boards or metal screening, making sure that the carrier extends 8-10" underground. Remove other potential cover such as debris piles and low-growing vegetation.

- If you keep chickens, enclose the birds at night** – Secure the coop with well-fitting doors and a solid, concrete floor. Surround the coop with fencing that extends 6-8" underground to prevent opossums from digging into the chicken yard.

Thanks to the HOWL Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Washington state for providing the information in this pamphlet.