

# Living with Possums in South Australia

## What types of possums are found in South Australia?

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There are 5 types of possums found in South Australia.

Common Brushtail Possum  
Common Ringtail Possum  
Western Pygmy –possum  
Little Pygmy-possum  
Eastern Pygmy-possum

The species most commonly encountered in natural and urban environments are the Common Brushtail Possum and Common Ringtail Possum.

The following information relates specifically to the Common Brushtail Possum and Common Ringtail Possum.



Common Brushtail Possum  
(Photo: Peter Canty)



Common Ringtail Possum  
(Photo: Peter Canty)

## Conservation status of Common Brushtail and Common Ringtail Possums in South Australia

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The Department for Environment and Heritage has identified that the Common Brushtail Possum has suffered a significant decline in abundance and reduction in its range across South Australia and suspects that further decline in both the species area of occupancy and extent of occurrence is continuing.

Although Common Brushtail Possum populations remain secure within the Greater Adelaide Region, Mount Lofty Ranges and Kangaroo Island, the Department for Environment and Heritage has recommended that the Common Brushtail Possum be listed as rare on *the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* Threatened Species Schedules in 2004.

The status of the Common Ringtail Possum remains unchanged.

## Possums and the law

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### Are possums protected?

In South Australia, all possums are protected under the provisions of the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1972.

### I have a possum in my roof space, what can I do?

There are several options available to you.

### **Option.1 (NO PERMIT REQUIRED)**

#### **Provide an alternative home for the possum.**

- Step.1 Determine a suitable sheltered position on your property to erect a possum box.
- Step.2 Purchase or construct a possum box.
- Step.3 Install the possum box. Place the possum box at least 4 metres from the ground to protect the possum from domestic pets and feral foxes.

Possum boxes should be monitored to ensure they are not used by other feral animals such as starlings, house sparrows, bees, and European wasps.

### **Option.2 (NO PERMIT REQUIRED)**

#### **Prevent access into the roof space by blocking off access points.**

- Step.1 Determine how possums are gaining access into the roof space. This is best achieved by:
  - observing possum movement from your roof space is at dusk when the possums leave nest sites to forage for food,
  - or
  - inspecting the roof and eaves carefully for signs of scratching, urine/scent staining or dislodged possum hairs left where the possum enters the roof space.
- Step.2 Block off access points after you have observed the possum leaving the roof space and before the possum returns from foraging for food using timber and/or chicken mesh.
- Step.3 Destroy the possums scent markings at all entry points by applying household bleach to the affected areas.

The possum will be forced to find alternative shelter within its territory, possibly taking up refuge in a possum box installed on your property.

It is recommended that building repairs be carried out as you may find there is more than just a possum in your roof space. Your roof space may also be a home for rats, starlings and house sparrows.

### **Option.3 (NO PERMIT REQUIRED)**

#### **Install a one-way flap at the possum's access point to the roof space.**

Installing a one-way flap allows possums to leave the roof space but not return.

This flap can be made from metal or perspex, with a hinged top. It is recommended that the flap be surrounded with metal to prevent possums successfully pulling the door the other way with their claws.

### **Option.4 (PERMIT REQUIRED)**

#### **Place a possum trap in the roof space to capture the possum.**

- Step.1 Contact your local council or an equipment hire company to determine hire arrangements for a possum trap.
- Step.2 Obtain a permit to trap and release possums from your local Department for Environment and Heritage office.
- Step.3 Obtain the possum trap and position the trap inside the roof space near the possum's roof access point. Ensure the trap is secure and stable to avoid potential injury to the possum.

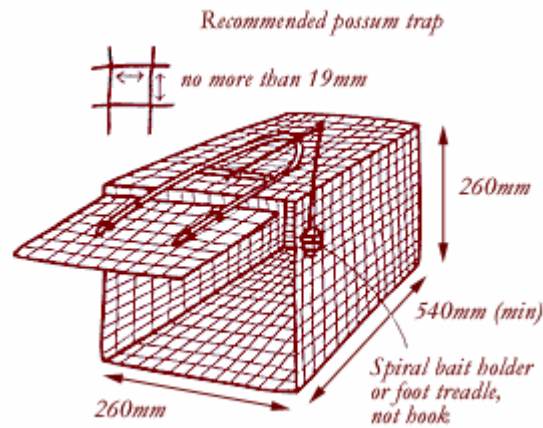
## **Trapping possums**

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### **What type of trap can I use to trap a possum?**

The recommended possum trap is a wire mesh box trap with mesh less than 19mm square. A trap with larger mesh can cause injury to possums.

The trap should have a spiral bait holder or foot treadle with a spring-activated door. Traps with bait hooks can cause serious injury to possums contained within the trap.



### Where can I get a possum trap?

Remember, if you intend to trap the possum yourself then you must obtain a Permit to Trap and Release from the Department for Environment and Heritage before you trap the possum.

Your local council may loan or hire possum traps. Please note there may be a waiting period of 2-3 weeks to obtain use of a trap.

Also, check the Yellow Pages under pest control, traps or equipment hire.

### What happens to the possum after it's caught?

Keep the possum in the trap and release at sunset on the day of capture, on the same property, within 50 metres of the capture site. Possums must be released within 24 hours of capture.

The trap must be covered with a breathable cloth, such as a hessian bag, and kept in a quiet place until sunset. It should also be protected from domestic pets, other wildlife and weather.

Do not release possums during the day because it increases their stress and puts them at risk of being attacked and injured.

### Can I destroy a Brushtail Possum myself?

Possums can be destroyed only if a permit has been issued by the Department for Environment and Heritage.

The only acceptable means of killing possums in the greater Adelaide metropolitan area and the Mount Lofty Ranges is by the use of carbon dioxide or by barbiturate overdose, which can only be administered by a registered operator.

The destruction of Brushtail Possums can be facilitated by:

- registered veterinarians,
- the Animal Welfare League, and
- animal research facilities that hold a current scientific permit and animal ethics approval (contact the Department for Environment and Heritage Biological Survey and Monitoring Program on telephone 8124 4725 for details).

Pest controllers can arrange for the destruction of possums on behalf of the landholder only in situations where the landholder has obtained a trap and destroy (destruction) permit from the Department for Environment and Heritage.

Please note that a permit to trap and destroy possums will only be granted if the applicant has tried all other means of dealing with this issue.

### **What should I do if I accidentally trap a Ringtail Possum instead of a Brushtail Possum?**

Keep the possum in the trap and release at sunset on the day of capture, on the same property, within 50 metres of the capture site. Possums must be released within 24 hours of capture.

The trap must be covered with a breathable cloth, such as a hessian bag and kept in a quiet place until sunset. It should also be protected from domestic pets, other wildlife and weather.

Rarely will the Department for Environment and Heritage issue a permit to destroy Common Ringtail Possums.

### **Possoms are destroying my garden – can I trap them?**

No, possums should only be trapped if they are living in buildings.

### **I have a wild possum in my roof. When will the Department for Environment and Heritage come and collect it?**

The Department for Environment and Heritage does not provide this service. This information is aimed at assisting landholders to manage impacts and live in harmony with urban wildlife.

Possums are part of the urban environment. Having a possum in your roof may mean that there are building maintenance issues requiring your attention. Removing the possum from its territory will not address your building maintenance issues.

There are simple steps that can be taken to reduce possum problems.

1. Prevent access into the roof space by blocking off access points.
2. Provide an alternative home for the possum.
3. Install a one-way flap at the possum's access point to the roof space.
4. Place a possum trap in the roof space to capture the possum then release it on your property after addressing the building maintenance issues. A permit from the Department for Environment and Heritage is required in this instance.

## **Pest controllers**

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### **Are pest controllers licensed? If so, by who?**

Pest controllers providing a possum removal service require a permit from the Department for Environment and Heritage. This permit grants approval for a pest controller to trap and release possums on behalf of the landholder onto the landholder's property within 50 metres of the capture site.

Pest controllers can arrange for the destruction of possums on behalf of the landholder only in situations where the landholder has obtained a trap and destroy (destruction) permit from the Department for Environment and Heritage.

### **How do I know if a pest controller has a possum permit?**

Not all pest controllers hold a permit to trap and release possums. Ask the pest controller to show you a copy of their permit or ask for their permit number. Should you wish to verify the permit status of the pest controller please contact the Department for Environment and Heritage Fauna Permit Unit on telephone 8124 4930 and quote the pest controllers permit number.

### **Should pest controllers, who possum proof buildings, hold any other licenses?**

Pest controllers, who provide a possum proofing service that involves altering, repairing or improving a building or house, must hold a Specified (Restricted) Builders License pursuant to the *Building Work Contractors Act 1995*. The Office of Business and Consumer Affairs administers this Act.

## **Excluding possums**

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### **How can I exclude possums from my house?**

#### **Ensure that all possible entry points are blocked off**

Possums can gain entry through loose roof tiles and holes the size of a tennis ball in timber/bricks.

Observe possum movement from your roof space at dusk. This is the time that the possum will leave the roof space to forage for food.



Ensure that you have blocked off all entry points after the possum has vacated the roof space.

### Trim any branches that overhang the house

Trimming overhanging branches and branches leading to your roof is likely to prevent possum access.

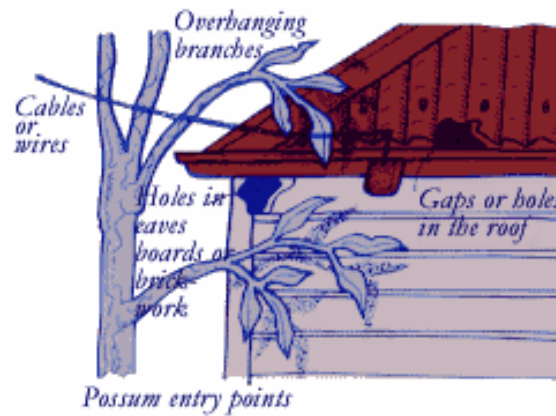


Image: Courtesy of Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

### Provide an alternative home for the possum

Install a possum box in a suitable sheltered position, at least 4 metres from the ground, to avoid conflict with domestic pets.

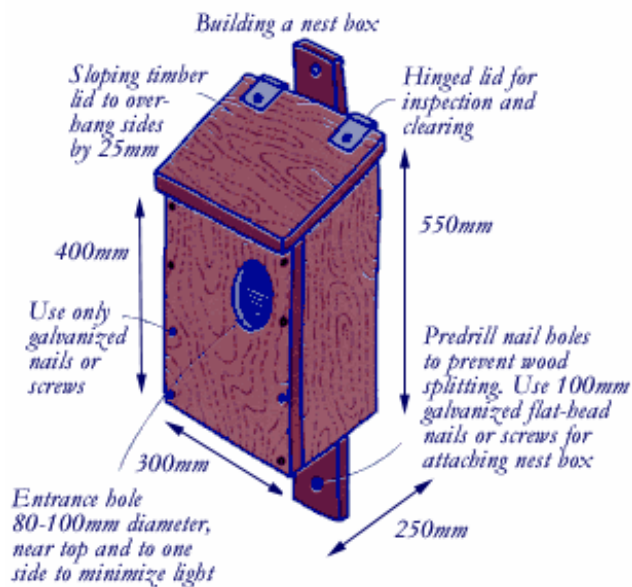
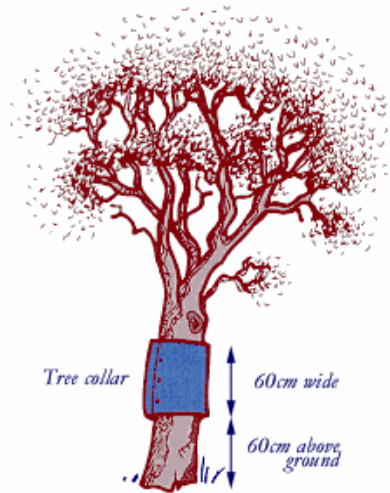


Image: Courtesy of Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria

### Place sheet metal collars on tree trunks

Place sheet metal collars, measuring 60cm wide and 60cm above the ground, on tree trunks of trees that provide possum access to your roof.



*Image: Courtesy of Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria*

### **Spread quassia chips in the roof space**

Quassia chips may repel possums from your roof space. These can be purchased at hardware stores.

### **Use blocks of camphor or mothballs in the roof space**

Blocks of camphor or mothballs in the roof space may repel possums from your roof space.

**DO NOT** use camphor and mothballs at the same time as they react chemically with each other.

## **Possum nest boxes**

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### **I'm interested in installing a possum nest box in my backyard. Where can I obtain one?**

#### **Purchasing a possum box**

Try:

- veterinarians specialising in the care of native wildlife
- local councils
- pest controllers
- garden shop/plant nurseries
- hardware stores
- St Agnes Primary School

#### **Building a possum box**

Native Animal Network Association

<http://www.nana.asn.au/>

#### **Nestbox book**

Gould League

<http://www.gould.edu.au/>

## **Relocating possums**

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### **I have always taken possums away and released them in the Adelaide Hills or in a National Park. What is wrong with that?**

Releasing possums away from the capture site is illegal and compromises the welfare of the possum.

Relocating possums to another area is inhumane, very stressful for the animal and will result in the death of the possum regardless of where you release them. It may also spread disease if the animal is sick.

## I have always taken possums away and they always come back. Why?

It is highly unlikely that the possum you relocated has returned. The possum you relocated will have died under very stressful circumstances.

Possums are part of the natural and urban environment and are territorial. Relocating a possum will not solve your problem. It simply means that a possum territory (which includes your property) will be vacant for only a short period of time before another possum arrives.

## Possum problems

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### What should I do if I find an injured possum?

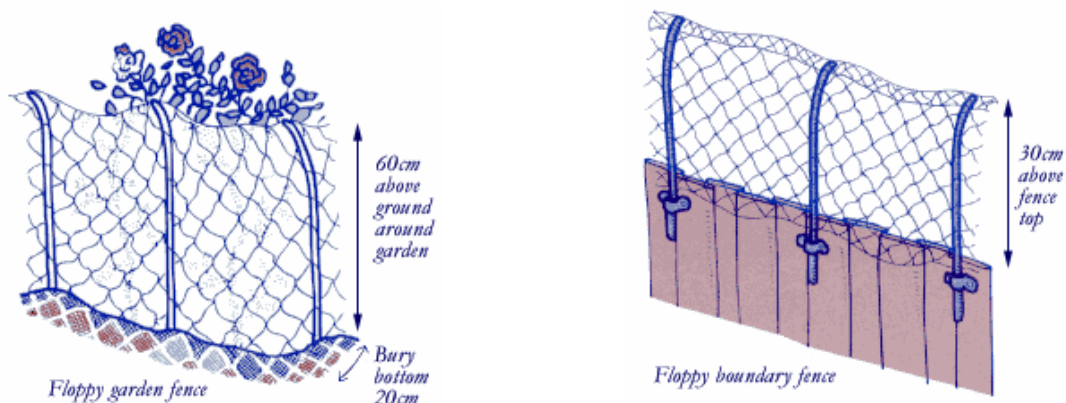
Injured possums should be taken to a registered vet or to a wildlife carer/rescue organisation.

Wildlife carer/rescue organisations can be found in the Yellow Pages listed under Animal Welfare Organisations.

### Possums are damaging my garden and eating fruit from my fruit trees. What can I do to stop them?

There are simple steps that can be taken to reduce possum damage to your garden:

1. Build a floppy fence around your ornamental or vegetable garden. Use 80cm wide, heavily galvanised chicken wire, bury the bottom 20cm and support the remainder on vertical lengths of flexible, high-tensile fencing wire. Bend the wire to curve the upper section outwards. When the possum attempts to climb the fence it will bend over and then spring back.
2. Use collars to protect fruit trees. Place a sheet metal collar, measuring 60cm wide and 60cm above the ground, to the tree.



*Images: Courtesy of Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria*

The effectiveness of possum repellents is variable. These could be used in conjunction with other recommended deterrent measures listed above.

## Who can I contact?

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If you require further clarification on the above information please contact your nearest Department for Environment and Heritage office.