

WILDLIFE INFORMATION ON OPOSSUMS



As the development of once rural areas increases, the opossum continues to be pushed out of its natural habitat and forced to live in a more urban environment. Opossums are extremely adaptable and have successfully made the transition to accept people as their neighbors. With a little tolerance and understanding you can do the same for the opossum, and we can all happily co-exist.

Considered rodents by many, this is a common misconception. Opossums are marsupials, or pouched mammals, and are related to the kangaroo and the koala. The opossum holds the distinction of being North America's only marsupial. We should not consider them as pests, but beneficial to the environment, as they eat all kinds of bugs and insects including cockroaches, beetles, cricket and spiders. Snails and slugs are considered a delicacy. They also help keep the rat and mouse population in check. Opossums have well earned the title of "Nature's Little Sanitation Engineers."

By nature opossums are non-aggressive, non-destructive and do not pose a threat to humans. However, when threatened they will attempt to defend themselves. Our best advice is to enjoy watching the opossums, but leave them alone.

TIPS FOR LIVING WITH OPOSSUMS

LEAVE THE OPOSSUMS ALONE

Opossums should be allowed to live in their natural habitat. They are opportunistic animals

and will often move into an area that has been damaged and then vacated by another animal. Unfortunately, the opossum is usually blamed for the damage.

DO NOT TRAP

Opossums are transient animals, staying only 2-3 days in an area before moving on. Removal is neither necessary nor desirable. Wildlife experts agree that if opossums were eliminated from an area, the population of roof rats and other pests would proliferate.

OTHER OPTIONS

If an opossum continues to return to your area, try eliminating the things that are attracting it. Clear away bushes, woodpiles and other hiding places, pick up fallen fruit from trees, and do not leave pet food out over night. Try leaving an outdoor light on at night.

OPOSSUM PROOF YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Make the area where you live less desirable. At night, keep doors and garages closed, and close windows that are located next to tree limbs and fences.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER AN OPOSSUM

Unlike other species of wild animals, opossums can be enjoyed by humans with little fear of disease or property damage. Leave the opossum alone and enjoy watching wildlife in your own backyard. Opossums are remarkably resistant to many diseases, including rabies. Opossums are very clean and constantly grooming themselves. They are not aggressive and unlikely to attack humans. However, if the opossum is injured or an orphan (less than 7 inches from nose to rump) then contact the Opossum Society of the United States, a local wildlife rehabilitator, a veterinarian, or your local animal shelter for help. Opossums are beneficial eating unwanted pests around your home and garden such as snails, slugs, spiders, cockroaches, rats, mice and snakes. Opossums are free gardeners!

Often times at night, dogs will bark when encountering an opossum in the yard. A dog will bark at anything it sees or hears. The best thing you can do for the opossums AND your neighbors are to train the dog or keep the dog indoors at night. This will also prevent the dog from injuring or killing an opossum.

In general, opossums are docile, non-aggressive animals and will not attack your pets. They prefer to avoid confrontations. If escape is not possible then the threatened opossum may "play 'possum", show its teeth, or bite in self-defense, as any animal would.

Children should be taught not to attempt to feed or touch a wild animal. Opossums are nocturnal, that is they sleep during the day and come out at night, so the chance that a small child will come into contact with an opossum is slim. Opossums prefer to sleep in dark, secluded places. If your children are playing in this type of area then there is a greater danger of being bitten by a poisonous spider or snake.

To keep opossums out of your home or garage, close all doors, pet doors and unscreened windows before dusk. Put food away so the opossum will not be tempted to enter. If an opossum enters, provide a safe exit route and leave the room.

Westminster Animal Control emphasizes peaceful co-existence with our indigenous wildlife. If you have any questions regarding wildlife or need assistance for dead, injured or baby opossums, please contact Westminster Animal Control at (714) 898-3315 at extension 365. You can also visit the Opossum Society of the United States at www.opossumsocietyus.org for downloadable information and materials.



Service with Integrity

**Westminister Police Department
ANIMAL CONTROL DIVISION
8200 Westminister Blvd.
Westminister, CA 92683
(714) 548-3201**

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**THE WESTMINSTER
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