

## Ways you can reduce wildlife problems:

- Make sure your trash cans have tight lids and that the cans are secured in some way as not to be toppled.
- Pick as much of your fruit as possible before it is totally ripe. Pick up all fallen fruit.
- Pick up all pet food and water dishes at dusk. Train all pets to eat during daylight hours.
- Lock pet doors at night. Do not let your pets out unsupervised after dark.
- Make sure that all vents and openings to the house and attic are covered with heavy gauge mesh. Also make sure the chimney has a spark arrester.
- Trim trees and hedges at least three feet from the roof.
- Do not leave windows or sliding doors without screens open and unattended, (or garage doors) to prevent unwanted animals from entering.
- Put your dog inside the house or garage if you see a wild animal on your fence or in your yard. Turn on a yard light and let the critter know you see it. Do not approach it!
- Never intentionally feed a wild animal!
- Keep bird feeders clean making sure that the feed is changed regularly to prevent mold and bacteria.
- Educate yourself, your family and your neighbors about our local wildlife. Many problems we have with wildlife can be prevented with a little effort and education.



Opossum Tracks

**For more information or assistance,  
contact:**

**Wildlife Information, Literature, Data  
& Education Service (WILDE  
Service)**

(805) 687-9980 Message Line  
(805) 887-3574 Pager # (for  
emergencies)

**You may send donations to:  
1560 N. Ontare Rd.  
Santa Barbara, CA 93105**

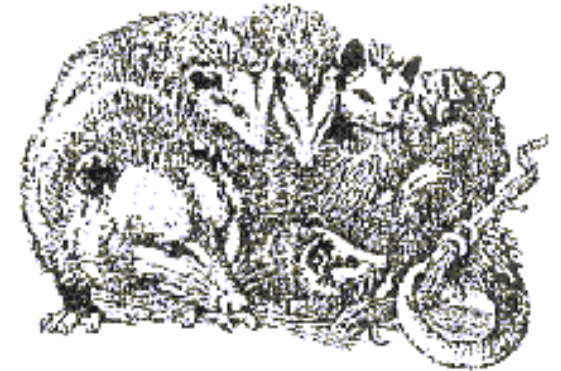
Santa Barbara County  
Animal Services  
(805) 681-5285 (SB)  
(805) 737-7755 (Lom)  
(805) 934-6119 (SM)

Santa Barbara City Animal Control  
(805) 963-1513

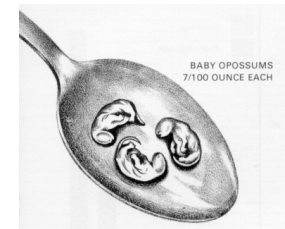
Agricultural Commissioner's Office  
(805) 681-5600

<http://www.co.santa-barbara.ca.us/agcomm/index.htm>

# Living With Opossums



**Opossums** are the only animals in our country that belong to the marsupial family. Their babies develop in the mother's pouch like koalas and kangaroos.



Though they share physical similarities, they are **NOT** related to rats.

**OPOSSUMS** are one of the oldest mammals around. Fossils have been found that date back to the dinosaur age.

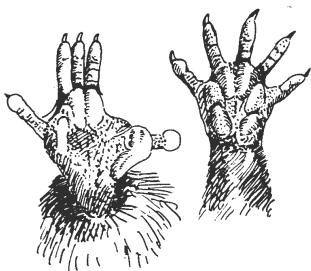
There are many interesting facts about **opossums**, such as their low body temperature (95° - 97°F), resistance to disease (including rabies), their immunity to rattlesnake and insect venom, prehensile tail and opposing thumbs, plus many more unusual traits.

In Santa Barbara County, **opossums** are a common urban resident. They are basically nocturnal but occasionally are observed foraging for food in the daytime.

20% of their diet is ripe fruit and vegetables. The remaining 80% consists of insects, snails, mice, rats, and gophers. Only occasionally does it eat bird eggs.

Because they are scavengers, they oftentimes 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 trash can or ripped up your lawn.

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”



**Opossums** are nature's pest control operators. They are far more beneficial than

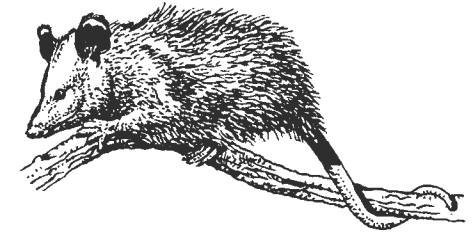
beautiful and you can consider yourself lucky to have them in your yard.

They can best be described as light gray in color with a white face and tail, pink fingertips and nose and their eyes and most of the ears are jet black. They are generally slow moving, mainly because they have poor eyesight, relying heavily on their amazing sense of hearing and smell to guide them along in their search for food.



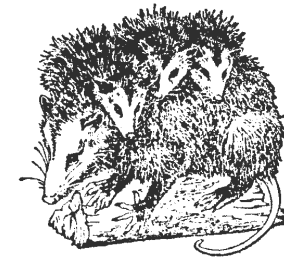
**Opossums** generally come into our yards looking for food. Urban critters have discovered that pet food and fallen fruit make for an easy meal. Cats can often be seen sharing their food dishes with an adult opossum.

Uncovered garbage cans can be a problem for these animals as they can let themselves into open containers with their prehensile tail and then cannot get back out. If you find one in your trash can, turn the can on its side so that the animal can walk out when it feels safe.



Because the babies develop in the pouch for the first two months of their life, they do not need a nest. When the babies are about the size of a mouse, they occasionally come out of the pouch to ride on the mother's back as she forages. At about three months the babies can follow behind her, eventually going out on their own.

The mortality rate is high for young **opossums** as they are easy prey for hawks, owls, and domestic cats and dogs. Out of an average of eight babies, only one or two will survive to the age of three years if is lucky.



**OPOSSUMS** are one of our most interesting animals yet they are one of the most misunderstood. If you have a chance to observe one in your yard, take a few moments to appreciate it and educate yourself about it. **Both you and the animal will benefit from the experience!**