



Controlling Opossum Damage

The opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*) is the only marsupial (a pouched mammal) found in North America. The opossum's habitat is diverse, ranging from woodlands to open fields. They are most commonly found around streams or other wetland areas. In urban areas they seek shelter in attics, garages, chimneys, under houses, or in any other place that offers protection. Although very common in urban areas, opossums are rarely seen because they are nocturnal.

Opossums are omnivores and eat a wide variety of foods. Their primary food is animal matter such as insects, earthworms, small rodents, snakes, snails, birds and frogs, but they also eat many kinds of fruits, berries and vegetables. In urban areas they may eat pet food, fruit on trees, pecans, seeds in bird feeders and garbage in trash cans.

Although opossums are considered desirable furbearers in some areas, they may become a nuisance near homes. Opossums are capable of transmitting several different diseases. Although opossums can transmit rabies, they appear to be very resistant to the disease. Because opossums salivate heavily, people may assume they are rabid. Opossums may also carry murine typhus, and the

fleas that infest them can transmit the disease to people or pets. Where opossums are common, pet owners should be diligent in controlling fleas on their animals.

Biology and Reproduction

Adult weight: 4 to 15 pounds.

Total length: 24 to 34 inches.

Color: Ranges from black to light gray.

Body: Pointed face, round hairless ears, short legs, and a rat-like tail.

Gestation period: Born 13 days after mating, crawls to mother's pouch, attaches to a nipple and continues to develop for 7 to 8 weeks.

Litter size: Average of seven to eight, may have up to thirteen.

Litter number: Two per year, born year-round.

Weaning: About 4 months of age.

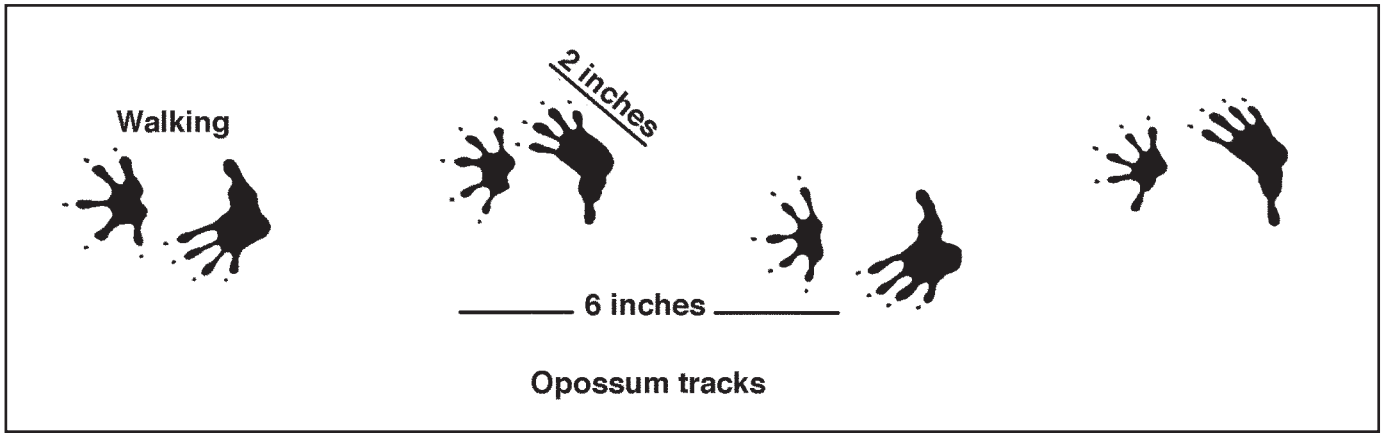
Life span: 4 years.

Control Methods

Mechanical Control

Opossums can be controlled in a number of ways. In rural areas they can be shot or trapped with leghold traps or cage traps. In urban areas cage traps are the most effective and the safest method of control. Cage traps are available from feed or hardware stores. A cage trap with dimensions of at least 10 inches x 12 inches x 36 inches is adequate. Almost any type of food can be used as bait to catch opossums, although there is less chance of catching a small dog or cat if fruits such as apples, pears or bananas are used.





Environmental Control

Where opossums are causing damage or creating a nuisance, several things can be done to discourage them. Lids should be kept on trash cans; pets should be fed in the morning and all leftovers cleaned up immediately; and water bowls should be emptied or taken in at night. Attic and foundation vents should be screened to discourage opossums from taking up residence in and around the home. Bird feeders should be placed on tall, metal poles and away from trees.

Chemical Control

At the present time there are no toxicants, fumigants or repellents registered for the control of opossums.

Restrictions

Opossums are classified as furbearers in Texas, but it is legal to trap them. Under state law a person may take furbearing animals at any time if they are causing damage; however, their pelts can be sold only during the furbearer season and with the proper licenses. Other furbearers include beaver, otter, mink, nutria, ringtailed cat, badger, skunk, weasel, raccoon, muskrat, fox and civet cat.

Homeowners wishing to trap and relocate opossums should notify local Texas Parks and Wildlife representatives.

For additional information contact the nearest office of the Texas Wildlife Damage Management Service.

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