

OPOSSUM FACTS

- Opossums lived during the Age of the Dinosaurs...fossil remains have been found from 70 million years ago! This means that the opossum is part of the Earth's oldest surviving mammal family.
- The opossum doesn't have a permanent "nest" because it is nocturnal and transient. It will spend an average of 2-3 days in the same hideout, then move on. Some weeks later it may return to your place, depending on your hospitality.
- Opossums have soft, rounded, nail-less opposable thumbs on their hind feet.
- Opossums do not dig holes, as their paws are very soft and tender, much like a human hand.
- Opossums may growl, drool, and show their 50 teeth when frightened, but in reality are placid and prefer to avoid any confrontation.
- Slow-moving with very sensitive hearing and smell, opossums are not territorial and will adapt to any environment where food, water and shelter exist.
- Opossums do not hang by their tails—the tail stabilizes their position while climbing and walking.
- Besides their natural predators in the wild, humans, cars and cats are the demise for this docile creature. Very few survive to adulthood, and usually live only 1-2 years if they do.
- "Playing 'possum" is one of the most effective ways the opossum defends itself. When unable to flee, extreme fear places the opossum into an involuntary coma. They become stiff and their mouth will gape open. This condition will last 40 minutes to 4 hours. Most predators will abandon their attack, once the opossum is thought to be dead.
- Opossums cannot jump. An opossum may get into a trash can if it has already been knocked over by another animal, or if it's against a fence and the opossum drops into it, which can trap the opossum in the trash can. Just tip the trash can over and eventually the opossum will scramble away.
- Opossum fur coloring is most commonly grey but can range from white and cinnamon to black.
- Baby opossums are usually born between the months of February and June.



THE OPOSSUM SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES
P.O. Box 850695, Yukon, OK 73085
www.opossumsocietyus.org

THE OPOSSUM SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

DEDICATED
TO THE
UNDERSTANDING,
PROTECTION
AND
PRESERVATION
OF THE
OPOSSUM



www.opossumsocietyus.org

THE OPOSSUM STORY

As the bulldozers roar over rural areas, land once roamed by our valuable little friend, the opossum, falls to development. The opossum is being pushed out of its home with no place to go. However, with tolerance and understanding, opossums and humans can happily co-exist.

Whether rural, residential or in the wilderness, opossums are a benefit to any area they inhabit. Their diet includes all types of insects—including cockroaches, crickets and beetles—plus garden pests such as slugs and snails. They also eat mice and rats which is a boon to any orchard owner. Unlike rats, opossums prefer overripe fruit, past its harvest prime.

Called "Nature's Little Sanitation Engineers," opossums help maintain a clean and healthy environment by eating carrion and food discarded by man. What usually attracts them to a backyard is pet food left out after dark. Unlike other species of wild animals, opossums can be enjoyed by humans with little fear of disease or property destruction. They are remarkably resistant to many diseases, including rabies. Opossums are very clean and constantly groom themselves. They are not aggressive and will not attack humans.

THE OPOSSUM SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES was founded in California in 1986 as the Opossum Society of California. Enormous national interest allowed this group to expand and extend its corporation name to "United States" so that the literature requested by other states would be generic and not state-specific. OSUS is a volunteer group that raises orphan opossums and arranges veterinary and follow-up care for injured opossums until their safe release back into the environment. In a typical year, OSUS and its volunteers will receive and raise over 2500 orphans for release back into the environment.

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Opossums are North America's only native marsupial (animals whose females possess a pouch for their young). Litters average about eight. Like baby kangaroos and koalas, opossum babies stay inside the mother's pouch to nurse and develop.

After approximately 2 ½ months, the babies leave the pouch and ride around on their mother's back. Do not startle the mother opossum, or in her flight a baby may drop off her back and become an orphan, which cannot survive on its own. At approximately 4 ½ months of age, the mother will leave her babies to fend for themselves—they will measure approximately 7" long snout to rump (excluding tail).

Note: For important information on the complete nutritional/environmental needs of captive (handicapped or orphaned) opossums, please contact OSUS.

OSUS NEEDS YOU!

There are many ways to help the opossums. Please take a moment to find which suits you best. Donations are tax-deductible, and every contribution, large or small, is important!

I CARE:

- Please find enclosed my tax-deductible contribution.
- Please contact me about helping raise orphaned opossums for release back into the environment.
- I want to become a member of OSUS and receive the quarterly newsletter and membership packet which includes diet, medical and general and updated information about opossums. (\$30.00/year)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State __ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

- I am currently involved in opossum rehabilitation/orphan care

Please make checks payable to the Opossum Society of the United States

Mail to: P. O. Box 850695, Yukon, OK 73085

<http://www.opossumsocietyus.org>

EMERGENCY CARE FOR ORPHANED BABIES

A baby opossum (measuring up to 4" from nose to rump, excluding tail) is not able to survive long without its mother.

The Opossum Society of the United States uses extensive knowledge and dedicated manpower to save the orphaned and injured and recommends that opossum babies be turned over to an experienced opossum caregiver as soon as possible.

If a 4" or less baby opossum is found:

Keep the baby warm (85°-95°). Wrap the baby in a clean towel or rag and warm in your hands or with a car heater. Put a thick towel around a heating pad (set on low), water bottle, or glass jar filled with hot water. Wrap the baby completely in soft bedding material and place next to the heat source. *Never place baby directly against an artificial heat source!*

If a 4"-7" baby is found:

Cover with a towel to keep it warm (no artificial heat source is necessary). Offer water in a shallow bowl. **Do not give cow's milk.**

If fleas are apparent, lightly dust opossum and its bedding with cornstarch or baby powder (no talc).

If there are no OSUS members in your area, call your local Humane Society, animal shelter, wildlife care center or veterinarian. Before you tell them you have an opossum, find out what kind of care a baby or injured opossum would receive. *It is important to make sure they will not euthanize the animal!*

If no other resource is available to you, start babies 3"-4" on **Esbilac, KMR** or **goat's milk** diluted with equal parts of water.

Start the larger 4"-7" baby on kitten chow which has been moistened with water.

Start giving an adult opossum dry cat/dog chow and email the Opossum Society of the United States immediately for complete diet information. The above diets are not nutritionally complete for long-term feeding.