



Weekender

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August 5, 2010

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CHUCK SMITH RETIRES



Be sure and visit our web site
at
<http://www.surfsideonline.org/>

After coming out of retirement to work with the Water/Field Services Crew at Surfside for a short period, that siren song of “How nice to do nothing and then rest afterward” called again.

Congratulations Chuck and enjoy your retirement!

OPOSSUM



Figure 1. Opossums measure 2 to 3 feet in length, a third of which is a round, scaly, sparsely haired tail. The head is conical, tapering to a slender, elongated snout tipped by a pink-colored nose. The face is light gray to white, whereas the general color of the fur from neck to rump is grayish white. Because of its body shape, a small opossum is sometimes mistaken for a large rat. (Photo by Kim Chandler.)

Prior to European settlement of North America, the **Virginia opossum** (*Didelphis virginianus*, Fig. 1) was found only in Central America and the southeastern United States. During the 1900s, its range expanded northward and westward.

Virginia opossums, also known as “possums,” first arrived in Washington in the early 1900s as pets and novelties. Some of these animals, or their offspring, later escaped from captivity or were intentionally released.

With few natural predators, the absence of hunting, and an abundance of food and shelter, opossums have adapted well to living close to people in urban and suburban environments. Except for higher elevations, opossums now occupy most human-occupied habitats in western Washington.

Opossums are marsupials (mammals with a pouch in which they carry their young), a primitive group of mammals found most commonly in Australia. Kangaroos, koalas, and wombats are other well known marsupials. Opossums are the only marsupials in North America. All other mammals are placentals, which means their young develop within a saclike membrane called the placenta inside the mother’s uterus, rather than in an exterior pouch.

In Australia and elsewhere, many species of marsupial have been out-competed and even driven to extinction by more modern mammals. Yet, the opossum has adapted to the changing environment in the Western Hemisphere, and continues to thrive.

Opossums are inhibited animals, especially in daylight or under artificial light, but are by no means stupid. Results from some learning and discrimination tests rank opossums above dogs and more or less on a par with pigs in intelligence.

Facts about Washington’s Opossums

Food and Feeding Habitats

- Opossums lived during the time of the dinosaurs and one reason for their continued survival is their ability to eat nearly anything.
 - Foods include fruits, nuts, grains, insects, slugs, snakes, frogs, birds, bird eggs, shellfish, mice, and carrion (dead animals).
 - Around human habitation, opossums also eat garbage, pet food, birdseed, poultry, and handouts.
 - A study of Portland Oregon’s opossum population found that small mammals (dead and alive) were the most important food in winter and spring, slugs in summer, and fruits in fall.
 - Because opossums eat many road-killed animals, including other opossums, they often become road kill themselves.
 - Because opossums accumulate little body fat for winter and don’t store food, they must forage year-round.
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OPOSSUMS CONT.

Den Sites

- Opossums will den nearly anywhere that is dry, sheltered, and safe. Den sites include burrows dug by other mammals, rock crevices, hollow stumps, logs and trees, woodpiles, and spaces in or under buildings.
- Their fur doesn't provide much insulation, so opossums fill their dens with dried leaves, grass, and other available soft material to form well-insulated nests. Nest materials are carried in their coiled tail.
- To avoid predators, opossums move to a different den every few days. (A male opossum followed by radio tracking used 19 different dens in five months.)
- A female with young or an opossum "holed up" during a cold spell will use the same den for a greater length of time.

Reproduction

- Opossums are successful as a species due in part to the size and frequency of litters.
- The breeding season begins as early as January and may continue to mid-November.
- Being marsupials, opossums give birth to undeveloped young. Only 12 days following breeding, five to ten bumblebee-sized pups crawl into their mother's pouch, where each firmly attaches to a teat.
- Opossum pups find nourishment, warmth, and safety in the pouch. When closed, it is so well sealed that if the female swims, the pups remain dry.
- At 60 to 70 days old, the house mouse-size young begin to leave the pouch for brief periods, returning to suckle.
- At 80 to 90 days old, the young begin to ride on their mother's back with their feet and tail firmly attached to her fur (Fig. 2). (Contrary to myth, a female opossum never carries her young on her tail.)
- At 3½ months of age, the young begin to leave the den to feed on their own, and soon disperse to establish their own territories.

Figure 2. Young opossums ride on their mother's back with their feet and tail firmly attached to her fur.
(From Christensen and Larrison, *Mammals of the Pacific Northwest: A Pictorial Introduction*.)



Opossum Continued

Mortality and Longevity

- Opossums have high mortality rates at all ages. They are killed by dogs, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, bobcats, eagles, hawks, and owls, with young opossums being the most vulnerable.
- Car kills in the fall and in winter conditions account for many opossum deaths.
- Opossums rarely live a full two years in the wild.

Viewing Opossums

Opossums are nocturnal, spending the day in dens or other protected spots. However, they can be seen at any time of day, especially in winter when food is scarce. At night, opossums forage in areas near their current dens, but can travel up to 2 miles in search of food.

Opossums are solitary animals, and except during breeding season or a female with her young, they are rarely seen together. Opossums do not hibernate.

Although they can climb and are good swimmers, opossums prefer to amble about on the ground. With a top speed of about 4 miles per hour, when “running,” opossums appear to be walking quickly, with the tail rotating in circles for balance. When idle, opossums constantly groom themselves, much as house cats do. A nighttime walk along a path bordering a stream or wetland, or down an alley lined with trashcans, will occasionally turn up an opossum searching for food. Strong but not agile climbers, opossums can be observed climbing trees to escape, search for food, rest, or to look for dens. Their tails are able to wrap around and grasp tree limbs and can support the animal’s full weight for short periods. (Contrary to myth, opossums do not hang upside down by their tails when sleeping.)



Figure 3. The opossum’s front tracks are about 2 inches in diameter and hind tracks are slightly larger. The opossum’s long tail often leaves drag marks in snow or mud. (Drawings by Kim A. Cabrera.)

Trails

Opossums readily use trails made by other wildlife or humans near creeks, ravines, and wetlands. Like raccoons and foxes, opossums use culverts as a safe way to cross under highways and roadways.

In developed areas, trails occur along buildings and fences. Wear marks and hairs may be found around the edges of entry points where opossums are entering a building or crawling under a fence. Opossum hair is long and silver to gray in color.

Tracks

Tracks can be found in mud, snow, or fine soil; also on deck railings, downspouts, and other surfaces that opossums use to gain access to structures (Fig. 3). The opossum’s opposable hind thumbs create a unique print, pointing as much as 90 degrees away from the direction of travel .

Calls

Opossums are among the most silent animals that live in Washington, but when frightened or threatened they growl and hiss.

Opossum Continued

Playing Possum

The opossum is a slow runner and when threatened will usually growl, hiss, and bare its teeth or try to escape by climbing the nearest tree. However, when caught out in the daylight with little chance of escape, or when attacked, the opossum will “play possum.” This is a surprisingly effective defense commonly seen in insects. In such cases the opossum will fall on its side, curl its body, open its drooling mouth, and excrete droppings—all to give the appearance of being dead.

While the opossum is in this state, which lasts several minutes or several hours, no amount of prodding will produce a response. Though it appears to be in a catatonic state, its metabolic processes are as high as when the animal is fully alert.

When the opossum believes the danger has passed, it will begin to wiggle its ears in an effort to pick up sounds. If it thinks the danger has passed, it will pick up its head and look around. If danger persists, the opossum will play dead again.



Figure 5. When caught out in the daylight with little chance of escape, or when attacked, the opossum will “play possum.”

Preventing Conflicts

In urban areas, opossums are beneficial as rodent and carrion eaters. They also clean up uneaten food that might otherwise attract mice and rats. However, in rural areas the impact of non-native opossums preying upon native invertebrates, small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, ground-nesting birds, nestlings, and eggs is of concern to wildlife biologists.

As long as they are kept out of human homes, not cornered, and their interaction with pets is limited, opossums are not dangerous. If an opossum finds its way into your house, stay calm, close surrounding interior doors, leave the room, and let the animal find its own way out through the pet door or an open door or window. If necessary, gently use a broom to coral the opossum outside. Do not corner an opossum, thereby forcing it to defend itself.

If the opossum appears sick or injured, call a wildlife rehabilitator or your local wildlife office (see [Wildlife Rehabilitators and Wildlife Rehabilitation](#)).

Although generally gentle and placid, opossums have 50 teeth and will use them to protect themselves, or their young (Fig. 6). So avoid close encounters.

An opossum's search for food may lead it to a vegetable garden, garbage can, or chicken coop. Its search for a den site may lead it to an attic, chimney, or crawl space. The most effective way to prevent conflicts is to modify the habitat around your home so as not to attract opossums.

Recommendations on how to do this are given below:

Don't feed opossums. Feeding opossums may create undesirable situations for you, your children, neighbors, pets, and the opossums themselves. Opossums that are fed by people often lose their fear of humans and may become aggressive when not fed as expected. Artificial feeding also tends to concentrate opossums in a small area; overcrowding can spread diseases and parasites. Finally, these hungry visitors might approach a neighbor who doesn't share your appreciation of the animals. The neighbor might choose to remove these opossums, or have them removed.

Don't give opossums access to garbage. Keep your garbage can lid on tight by securing it with rope, chain, bungee cords, or weights. Better yet, buy garbage cans with clamps or other mechanisms that hold lids on. To prevent tipping, secure side handles to metal or wooden stakes driven into the ground. Or keep your cans in tight-fitting bins, a shed, or a garage. Put garbage cans out for pickup in the morning, after opossums have returned to their resting areas.

Feed dogs and cats indoors and keep them in at night. If you must feed your pets outside, do so in late morning or at midday, and pick up food, water bowls, leftovers, and spilled food well before dark every day.

Keep pets indoors at night. If cornered, opossums may attack dogs and cats. Bite wounds from opossums can result in fractures and disease transmission.

Prevent opossums from entering pet doors. Keep indoor pet food and any other food away from a pet door. Lock the pet door at night. If it is necessary to have it remain open, put an electronically activated opener on your pet's collar. Note: Floodlights or motion detector lights placed above the pet door to scare opossums are not long-term solutions.

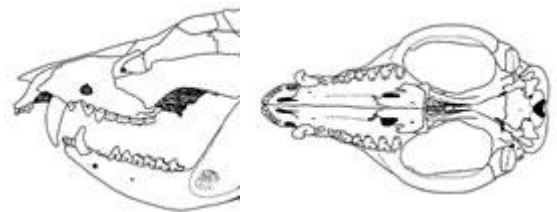


Figure 6. Their 50 teeth (more than any other mammal in North America) give opossums a menacing look when threatened. (From Verts and Carraway, Land Mammals of Oregon.)

OPOSSUM CONT.

Put food in secure compost containers and clean up barbecue areas. Don't put food of any kind in open compost piles; instead, use a securely covered compost structure or a commercially available opossums-proof composter to prevent attracting opossums and getting exposed to their droppings. A covered worm box is another alternative. If burying food scraps, cover them with at least 8 inches of soil and don't leave any garbage above ground in the area—including the stinky shovel. Cover the burial site with heavy wire mesh and a weight as further prevention.

Clean barbecue grills and grease traps thoroughly following each use.

Eliminate access to denning sites. Opossums commonly use chimneys, attics, and spaces under houses, porches, and sheds as den sites. Close any potential entries with ¼-inch mesh hardware cloth, boards, or metal flashing. Make all connections flush and secure to keep mice, rats, and other mammals out. Make sure you don't trap an animal inside when you seal off a potential entry (see "Opossums in or Under Buildings" the handout *Evicting Animals from Buildings* for additional information).

Install a commercially designed and engineered chimney cap (homemade caps are often unsafe and may be a fire hazard). You can still have fires in your fireplace; however, the "cap" will keep opossums and other wildlife out. (For information on how to remove opossums from chimneys, see "Raccoons in Dumpsters and Down Chimneys" in the handout on Raccoons.)

Prevent opossums from accessing rooftops by trimming tree limbs away from structures and by attaching sheets of metal flashing around corners of buildings (Fig. 7). Commercial products that prevent climbing are available from farm supply centers and bird-control supply companies on the Internet (Fig. 8). Remove vegetation on buildings, such as English ivy, which provide opossums a way to climb structures and hide their access point inside.

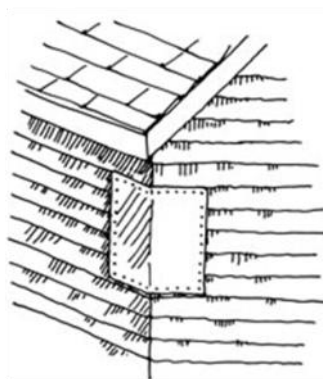


Figure 7. Opossums access to rooftops can be eliminated by installing sheets of aluminum flashing, at least 3 feet square, around the corners of buildings.

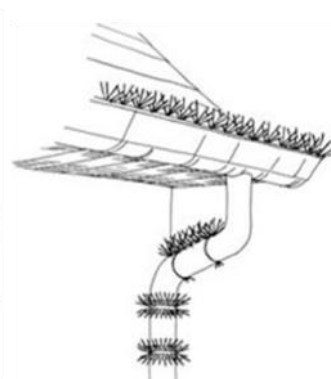


Figure 8. Commercially available metal or plastic spikes can help keep opossums off of buildings. (Drawings by Jenifer Rees.)

OPOSSUMS CONT.

Occasionally an opossum will find a suitable den site in or under a building. Opossums normally occupy a den site for only two or three consecutive nights. However, during the mating and nesting season, females are attracted to warm, dry, dark, easily defended areas, and will remain longer if the setting remains favorable.

Should you choose to remove the animals, a wildlife control company can be hired (call your local [Fish and Wildlife office](#) for a current list of contacts), or you can complete the process yourself using the steps below. (For detailed information, see [Evicting Animals from Buildings.](#))

1. Seal all openings except the main opossum entrance. Use sturdy wire mesh (1/4-inch hardware cloth or similar materials) to screen vents near ground level in houses and other structures.

Tightly seal holes in foundations or under porches to prevent opossums from entering.

2. To determine entry points, you can use "tracking patches" of a fine layer of sand, talcum powder, or dust placed at suspected entrances. Wadded up newspaper lightly stuffed into the entry hole also works great. Opossums will push the paper out of the way when exiting.

3. After dark, when the opossum has left seeking food they will leave tracks at the den entrance. Inspect the powder or the dislodged newspaper for exiting opossum tracks.

4. Once an opossum has left the building, immediately seal the entrance with a hardware cloth "one-way door" (Fig. 9). (You will not want to permanently exclude at this point, not being sure of the number of opossums present.) The one-way door can be made from 1/2 -inch hardware cloth that is attached over the opening, and hinged at the top and left loose on the other 3 sides. It should be larger than the opening so that it cannot swing inward. The opossum will push it open to leave, but cannot re-enter.

5. Put a layer of powder on the inside and outside of the door after the one-way door has been installed for two to three nights. Any footprints should be outside the door with none inside. This means the opossum is out. If you have any doubt, then smooth out the dirt on both sides of the door with your hand or a tool, reapply the powder and observe. Once a couple of days have gone by with no footprints, the opossum is probably gone. Another way to check is to open the door and shove a few pieces of wadded up newspaper into the opossum's entrance. If the paper stays in place for two to three nights, then the opossum is gone.

6. Once you are sure all opossums are out, permanently seal the opening.

To try and drive an opossum away, consider harassing the animal. Lighting up the den site with battery operated flashing lights and adding a portable radio can cause an opossum to seek a more suitable habitat.

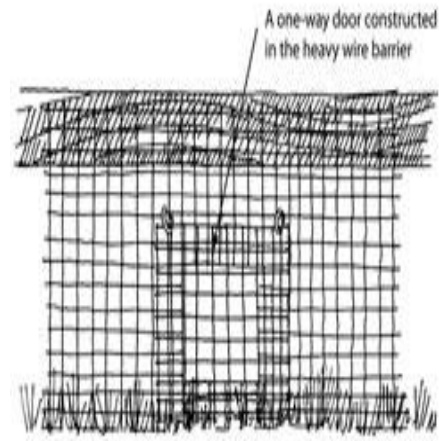


Figure 9. A one-way door can be used in conjunction with a welded wire or hardware cloth barrier. (Drawing by Jenifer Rees.)

Figure 10. An opossum's dexterous paws make it possible for it to open various types of fasteners, latches, and containers.

(From Christensen and Larrison, *Mammals of the Pacific Northwest: A Pictorial Introduction.*) habitat.



Opossum Continued

Public Health Concerns

Although opossums might carry several diseases of significance to humans, their role in the transmission of any of these diseases is uncertain. Anyone handling a dead or live opossum should wear rubber gloves, and wash his or her hands well when finished.

There is convincing evidence that the parasite that causes Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis (EPM), a disease in horses, is carried by the opossum. EPM is an infection of the central nervous system; the neurologic signs that are most apparent in horses include dizziness, weakness, and spasticity.

While there are no guaranteed methods of preventing exposure to this parasitic organism, horse owners can minimize risks by making facilities less attractive to opossums. Remove or seal up food that opossums might find attractive, such as cat food left out, grain sitting in buckets, feed in uncovered bins, and garbage in open cans. If feed has been left exposed, check it for droppings before serving it to your horses.

Droppings need not be fresh to be dangerous; the parasite can live outside a host and remain potentially infectious for as long as one year.

The rabies virus does not exist in Washington opossum populations, and for some unknown reason opossums rarely get rabies elsewhere.

If a person is bitten or scratched, immediately clean the wound by thoroughly scrubbing it with soap and water. Flush the wound liberally. A physician should examine all wounds caused by an opossum.

HAZERDOUS WASTE AND RECYCLING

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE	
HHW Facility Fridays May - September 9 am to 12 noon 318 N Second St <u>NO LATEX PAINT</u>	<u>ITEMS ACCEPTED</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil based paints • Pesticides/herbicides • Hobby/pool chemicals • Fluorescent lights • Batteries • Cleaning supplies • Solvents/fuels
Businesses/organizations, please call for a price estimate.	
SPECIAL EVENTS	
Appliance Day @ LB Transfer Station May 22 & Sept 25 10 am to 2 pm	Long Beach Transfer Station 4404 E 67th Place 642-4389
<u>ITEMS ACCEPTED:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washers • Dryers • Hot water heaters • Microwaves • Dishwashers • Refrigerators • Freezers • Ovens / stoves 	E-cycle Washington Bring your items to the transfer station any day during normal operating hours for free disposal. <u>ITEMS ACCEPTED:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPUs • Laptops • TVs • Monitors
For more information, visit www.co.pacific.wa.us or call 642-9382.	

Have large metal items you need picked-up? Talk to Nancy at the compactor to arrange for a pick-up. Also small metal items again being taking at the compactor for recycling.

The compactor will take Latex paint- open and dried out containers ----- But please NO OIL BASE-or--MOTOR OIL. Klipsan Napa has a disposal for used oil and filters for your convenience. Thanks

CABANA CONCERT

The Surfside Homeowners Association is pleased to announce that our own Judy Eron will be performing with her group 'Double J and The Boys' at the Twin Lakes Cabana on Saturday, August 21, at 2:00 p.m. What a great sound they create, as y'all know if you've heard them play their various gigs on the Peninsula this summer!

All are invited to attend; admission is free, but we will be collecting new or gently-used socks & sweatpants for Ocean Park Elementary School.

Plan to be there, and plan to bring a cushion or camp chair... seating is at a premium in the park.

REQUEST FOR DONATIONS FOR STUDENTS AT OCEAN PARK ELEMENTARY

The Community Relations Committee is sponsoring an Outreach Program for the students at Ocean Park Elementary. We are asking Surfsiders to donate new or gently-used clean sweats, socks and/or underclothes for students to change into after playing outdoors on the wet play-ground. Anything in a size range of Kindergarten through 6th Grade will be welcomed! A bin will be available for your donations at the Surfside Office. Thank you for your generosity (the teachers & children thank you, too!).

Sheila W.

RESTORATION WORK!

The Water and Field Services Crew work to restore the right-of-way on G Street to Pacific County specifications, after water main work. Thanks for a great job!



August 2010

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3 Architectural Meeting 9:00 A.M.	4	5 Lands and Buildings Meeting 1:00 P.M., Water and Field Services Meeting 2:00 P.M.	6	7
8	9	10 Architectural Meeting 9:00 A.M. Community Relation Comm. Meeting 1:00 P.M. Bunco 6:30 P.M.	11 RV Committee Meeting 9:00 A.M.	12	13	14
15	16	17 Architectural Meeting 9:00 A.M.	18	19	20	21 Board Meeting 9:00 A.M. Cabana Concert 2:00 P.M.,
22	23	24 Architectural Meeting 9:00 A.M.	25	26 Nancy Cheney 	27	28
29	30	31 Architectural Meeting 9:00 A.M.				