

Uninviting Our Wild Neighbors

Many of the reasons we enjoy our yards are often the same reasons that cause wildlife to feel at home. Our properties supply a quiet environment with plenty of food, water and cover. Take a look at your yard to see if you can make changes that can create a less hospitable place for these animals. Here are some suggestions:

- Remove or enclose woodpiles and thin dense vegetation to eliminate opossum hiding places.
- Remove all fallen or ripened fruit and vegetables on a daily basis.
- Cover compost piles and avoid composting human food items.
- Trim tree branches and shrubs away from the roof. You can also secure metal flashing around some trees to a height of about three feet to prevent climbing.
- Avoid leaving pet food and water sitting out when your pet is not outside.
- Make sure shed and storage area doors are tightly secured.
- Do not feed wild animals. It is illegal to feed predatory wildlife in the City of Los Angeles. (L.A.M.C. Sec. 53.06.5)
- Use deterrent methods to scare animals away.
- To prevent animals from falling into or building a nest in the chimney, install a screened fireplace cap.
- Ensure all gaps and eaves are securely screened. Secure crawlspace access screens with heavy duty construction cloth mesh of at least 16 or 18 gauge.
- If you do feed birds or squirrels, use feeders that are designed to cut down or prevent food from falling to the ground.



Tip: If you're not sure whether a wild animal is currently under a house or shed, lay a thin layer of white flour in front of the opening, hole or space in question. Check the spot several times during the night. When animal tracks are seen leading away from the spot, you can secure the screen or hole. You may need to repeat this if there is more than one animal.



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http://www.laanimalservices.com/About_Animals/Wildlife.htm

North Central Shelter

3201 Lacy Street
Los Angeles, CA 90031

Harbor Shelter

957 N Gaffey Street
San Pedro, CA 90731

East Valley Shelter

14409 Vanowen Street
Los Angeles, CA 91405

West Valley Shelter

20655 Plummer Street
Chatsworth, CA 91311

South LA Shelter

1850 W 60th Street
Los Angeles, CA 90047

West LA Shelter

11361 W Pico Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90064

ENCOUNTERS WITH...

OPOSSUMS



Picture courtesy LA Animal Services Wildlife Division

**City of Los Angeles
Department of
Animal Services
Wildlife Division**



A Beauty Or A Beast

So, you came across a large, rat-like animal with a huge gaping jaw, sharp teeth and beady eyes. Did it snarl, growl and drip saliva? Did it have a hairless tail? Well, you've probably met with one of our most common residents: *Didelphus virginiana*, the Virginia opossum.



Picture courtesy LA Animal Services Wildlife Division

Eastern Immigrant

There is documented evidence the Virginia opossum was first introduced in San Jose, California in 1910, by a New England immigrant. Despite being a rather simple-minded animal, opossums are a very successful species. They have adapted well to our Southern California environment.

One Of A Kind

Opossums have several unique features, some not shared by any other North American mammal. Opossums are marsupials, a relative of kangaroos, koalas and Tasmanian devils. They possess opposable thumbs and a prehensile tail, both used for gripping and climbing. It is a common myth that they can hang by their tails. Opossums also have 50 teeth, more than any other North American mammal. Marsupials raise their young in the marsupium (pouch) and the opossum's pouch is much better developed than most other marsupials. Opossum young are born in an embryonic state; hairless, blind and only partially formed (no back legs). They are about the size of a honeybee, and twenty newborns could fit into a teaspoon.

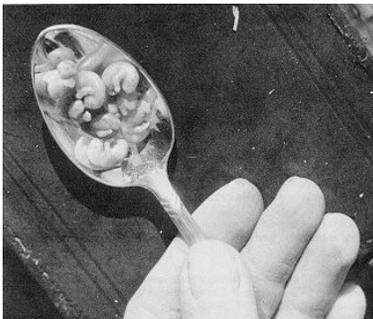


Photo by John Wood

Once the newborns find the marsupium, they attach to the teats, which then swell at the tip preventing the newborns from falling off. The young grow rapidly and are ready to leave the marsupium after about sixty days. Once old enough to leave the pouch around 1 to 2 months old, the youngsters hang onto the mother's fur as she travels about until they strike out on their own after about 3 months.



Courtesy Animal Advocates

Life Habits & Diet

Opossums can and will eat a host of items, most of which are easily found in our backyards and city streets. Opossums are nocturnal and eat insects, snails and slugs which is beneficial to gardens. They also eat fallen fruit, carrion, eggs, improperly stored garbage, pet food and leftovers in the compost pile. Opossums are not very quick animals, nor are they really great hunters of smaller mammals or birds. The opossum will seek shelter in locations such as abandoned nests of other animals, burrows, tree hollows, rock cavities, wood piles, brush piles, trash heaps, sheds, crawl spaces, under decks, inside of unused automobiles and even storage boxes in the attic.

In an attempt to get at a meal, opossums are often caught in trash cans and are unable to get out. If possible, turn the trash can on its side to allow it to escape. Keep trash can lids tightly secured or strapped to prevent further incidents.

Appearances Can Be Deceiving

Because of the opossums rat-like appearance, they are a very misunderstood creature. When threatened or cornered, opossums put up an impressive display of teeth, growls and drool. They will face their would-be attacker, making themselves as large as possible and shift back and forth. When attacked, opossums may 'play dead' by laying still and stiff with mouth agape. Biologists believe this is most likely an involuntary response, and is triggered by a release of chemicals into their bloodstream causing temporary paralysis. The paralysis subsides once the danger has passed and the chemical is purged from their system.



This photo was taken after a wall was removed exposing the Opossum between the bathtub and crawlspace. (photo by LAAS Wildlife Division)

Opossum Eviction

Opossums are often blamed for damage caused by other animals. Opossums are not generally known to fish Koi out of backyard ponds, cause lawn or yard damage or attack and kill neighborhood cats. Many residents are compelled to trap and remove opossums based on their looks and misinformation about their behavior. Despite trapping efforts, opossums will always be an abundant urban wild animal in your neighborhood. Rather than trapping the animal, it is better to remove food sources and maintain your property in a manner that is less inviting to them.

Trapping

The City of Los Angeles is not providing traps or issuing permits for the public to use their own, rented or borrowed traps to remove nuisance wildlife. Trapping is usually a short term solution and will result in the trapped animal's death and may cause the wild animals offspring to become orphaned leaving them to die of starvation or exposure to the elements. The removal of the animal merely creates a vacancy to be occupied by another. The Department of Animal Services Wildlife Division suggests trying alternative deterrent remedies before considering the use of traps. The option exists to contact a Pest Control company that has permits to remove wild mammals. The wildlife trapped by pest control companies would be euthanized as State law prohibits the relocation of predatory mammals.



Picture courtesy LA Animal Services

Feeding Opossums?

It is unlawful to feed predatory wildlife in the City of Los Angeles. (53.06.5 L.A.M.C.) Feeding can increase the danger of the spread of disease and draws in larger predators. Wild animals fed by humans may quickly lose their natural fear and possibly attack without provocation. Wildlife habituated to humans feeding them often have to be destroyed because of the danger they pose to neighborhood pets and residents.