



Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)

Order: Marsupialia Family: Didelphidae

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SIZE: About the size of a house cat. Weight, 4-14 lbs.; length, 25-40 inches; tail length, 12-15 inches.

DESCRIPTION: Generally a dark gray to black. Long, pointed pink nose. Naked, prehensile tail. Black ears are naked, rounded and thin. Eyes are prominent and black. Short legs. First toe of hindfoot is opposable (thumblike.) Has 50 teeth. Only marsupial in North America.

LOCOMOTION: Very slow and often gets killed by cars. Climbs trees. When frightened and unable to flee it may roll over, shut its eyes and feign death or "play possum."

COMMUNICATION: Generally silent, but may hiss or growl if confronted.

HABITS: Very adaptable. Found in wooded areas, farmlands, mountain foothills along streams, parks and suburban areas. Nocturnal and solitary. Does not hibernate, but may den up for several days at a time during very cold weather. It does not have a territory, and is always on the move looking for food.

DIET: Omnivorous. Eats carrion, insects, small mammals, frogs, reptiles, berries, nuts and plant matter.

RANGE: Most of the eastern United States, parts of New Mexico and Texas. Introduced into southwest, southern Arizona and much of central New Mexico. Found in Canada and along the west coast down to South America.

FAMILY LIFE: Females may have litters up to twice a year. After a gestation period of only 13 days, up to 20 young are born. They are still in an undeveloped or "embryonic" state and are the size of a small bean. They climb up the mother and enter her pouch, where they take one of the 13 nipples in their mouth and remain attached to her for 2 months. Those who do not obtain a nipple, perish. The young are then carried on the mothers back another 1-2 months whenever they are away from the den.

NESTING: A leaf nest in a hollow log, fallen tree, abandoned burrow, crevice or other private place.

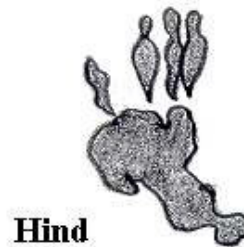
DID YOU KNOW THAT...?

- Very few opossums survive to adulthood. Causes of death include cars, predators and man.
- They are hunted with hounds for their fur, which is not particularly valuable, but used for trimming.
- Their shock-like state, "playing possum," may last for several minutes up to several hours.

Track

Front 2 X 2 inches

Hind 2 X 3 inches





Scat



Range

Not native to Arizona, has been introduced into the southern part of state and has been seen in other areas of the state.