

OPOSSUMS

There are several dozen different species of opossum, which are often called possums in North America. The most notable is the Virginia opossum or common opossum—the only marsupial (pouched mammal) found in North America.



Reproduction

A female opossum gives birth to helpless young as tiny as honeybees. Babies immediately crawl into the mother's pouch, where they continue to develop. As they get larger, they will go in and out of the pouch and sometimes ride on the mother's back as she hunts for food. Opossums may give birth to as many as 20 babies in a litter, but fewer than half of them survive. Some never even make it as far as the pouch.

Scavenger Behaviour

Opossums are scavengers, and they often visit human homes or settlements to raid garbage cans, dumpsters, and other containers. They are attracted to carrion and can often be spotted near roadkill. Opossums also eat grass, nuts, and fruit. They will hunt mice, birds, insects, worms, snakes, and even chickens. Opossums are omnivores and will eat almost anything they can find.

“Playing Possum”

These animals are most famous for “playing possum.” When threatened by dogs, foxes, or bobcats, opossums sometimes flop onto their sides and lie on the ground with their eyes closed or staring fixedly into space. They extend their tongues and generally appear to be dead. This ploy may put a predator off its guard and allow the opossum an opportunity to make its escape.

Tree Climbing

Opossums are excellent tree climbers and spend much of their time aloft. They are aided in this by sharp claws, which dig into bark, and by a long prehensile (gripping) tail that can be used as an extra limb. Opossums nest in tree holes or in dens made by other animals.

Life at Night

Opossums are nocturnal and spend the day safely hidden in hollow trees or holes in the ground. They have a suite of super senses that makes them perfectly adapted to life at night. They find food by smell rather than sight, aided by long, tactile whiskers to feel their way in the dark. Their hearing protects them from predators, particularly when they leave the safety of trees to forage on the ground.

Copy a subheading from the text.

1. Copy the title or main heading from the text.

2. Copy a phrase from the text that tells the reader there are many different types of possum.

3. In paragraph 1, Why did the writer write (pouched mammal)?

Tick the **best** answer.

He wanted to make it look interesting ____

He wanted to tell the reader what marsupial means ____

He wanted to use the word mammal ____

He wanted to make the sentence longer ____

4. 'Some never even make it as far as the pouch.' Why do you think this is?

5. Copy a phrase from the text that tells us Opossums are scavengers.

6. In paragraph 3, which word could be used to replace 'carrion'?

plants cooked meat fruit flesh

7. Why do Opossums sometimes 'appear to be dead'?

8. What does the paragraph 'Tree Climbing' tell us about Opossums?

Tick **two** answers.

Opossums can build tree houses ____

Opossums are excellent tree climbers ____

Opossums find their food in the trees ____

Opossums build nests in the trees ____

Opossums have sharp claws ____

9. In paragraph 6, what does the word 'nocturnal' mean?

10. How are Opossums adapted for life at night?

11. Where do Opossums forage for their food?

'aided by long, tactile whiskers to feel their way in the dark.'

12. What does the word 'tactile' mean?

13. What word could be used instead of 'tactile'?

strong thin tangible old ugly