

# Opossum

*(Didelphis virginiana)*



## DID YOU KNOW?

The opossum is the only marsupial (animal with a pouch) in North America. Fossils prove that these fascinating creatures have been around since dinosaurs walked the shores of the inland sea that was Missouri 70 million years ago.

## EATING HABITS:

Opossums are scavengers and will eat almost anything. They are especially fond of carrion (dead animals) but will eat fresh fruit and vegetables, insects, worms, slugs, snails and small reptiles. These marsupials are Nature's Clean-up Crew. Sometimes opossums will seek out food around your home, so keep trash in metal containers with lids and do not leave cat and dog food bowls out at night.

## THE YOUNG:

After birth, the young must climb through their mother's fur into a pouch on her abdomen.



When the babies are 80 days old, they begin spending time outside of the pouch, riding on Mom's back. Mom opossum takes very good care of her babies once they are out of the pouch. She grooms them frequently and keeps them with her for about ten weeks. You might see a mother with babies riding on her back as everyone looks for food.

## HABITAT (HOME):

Opossums are active year round and live in brush piles, hollow trees or perhaps even under your porch. They may even move into an abandoned fox den. Interestingly, they don't have fixed dens; opossums may spend the night in a different place every night.

## DEFENSIVE HABITS:

You often see opossums in your neighborhood at night looking for supper. They are very timid beasts. If you startle one, the first thing it will do is try to get away. If there is no clear path of escape, the opossum may hiss and show his fifty sharp teeth. As a last resort, it will roll over and play dead.

## UNUSUAL FACTS:

- Opossums tails are not strong enough to hang from branches, but they do use them to gather leaves and to help hold on as they climb trees.
- Opossums have thumbs on their hind feet
- The gestation period for an opossum is just 13 days, though the babies spend up to 90 days in the pouch.

