



Brushtail possum



Self-help possum control programme

## DESCRIPTION

The Brushtail possum is an introduced marsupial (have pouched young) and are widespread throughout New Zealand. They have a thick bushy tail, close woolly fur, fox-like ears and a pointed snout.

Brushtail possums represent a major threat to the Taranaki region in terms of their actual or potential harmful effects on economic production and on indigenous biodiversity values.

Possums are medium sized omnivores (feed on both meat and plants). Pasture comprises of 33% of the possum's diet, therefore, they compete directly with livestock. Possums also reduce the value of plantation forests by damaging young seedlings, breaking branches and ring barking.

They are active at night, although in winter starving or sick animals may emerge to feed in the afternoon. Possums generally emerge from their dens about 30 minutes after sunset. They return just before dawn in the summer, but often several hours earlier in winter. Favoured dens are in thickets of gorse, flax and scrub, but they are equally happy in hay rolls, barns, and the roofs of houses and garages.

Possum population densities within the region vary according to the topography, vegetation and history of control in any specific area. The highest possum population densities are found in the margins where forest and pasture meet.

## VALUES AT RISK

### *Ecological values.*

Possums feed on native plant species, and prey on or compete with native birds, lizards and insects for food. They also feed on the eggs and young of many of our native species.

### *Farm and forestry production.*

Possums feed on pasture and forestry seedlings.

### *Animal health.*

Particularly through their role as a vector (carrier) of bovine tuberculosis.

## STRATEGY RULES

*If your property is part of the Self-help Possum Control Programme (see map), you must control possums on your property to a level where they are not impacting upon your neighbour's property.*

## SELF-HELP POSSUM CONTROL PROGRAMMES

The Self-help Possum Control Programme has been systematically expanded throughout large parts of Taranaki, especially on the ring plain (see map). The programme involves the Taranaki Regional Council first reducing possum numbers on a property, which joins the Programme.

Thereafter, land occupiers are responsible for controlling and maintaining possum numbers at those low levels. If you are unsure whether your property is in the Programme, please contact the Council.

## USEFUL WEBSITES

[www.landcareresearch.co.nz/publications/infosheets/possums](http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/publications/infosheets/possums)

[www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

[www.npca.org.nz](http://www.npca.org.nz)

## PUBLICATIONS

King, EM: The Handbook of New Zealand Mammals. Oxford Press, Auckland, 1995

Montague, TL: The Brushtail Possum; Biology, Impact and Management of an Introduced Marsupial. Monaaki Whenua Press, Lincoln, 2000.

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment: Possum Management in New Zealand. Wellington, 1994.

## HOW TO CONTROL POSSUMS

The three main methods of possum control are poisoning, shooting and trapping. Details of these methods are on page two.

For further advice or information about pest animal management contact:

**TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL**

Pest Animal Management Section  
Private bag 713, Stratford

Ph: 06 765 7127 or 0800 736 222

Fax: 06 765 5097 [www.trc.govt.nz](http://www.trc.govt.nz)

## POISON

### Feracol

Feracol is the trade name for a cholecalciferol (vitamin D3) based paste. In a concentrated form, cholecalciferol becomes very toxic to some animals, elevating calcium levels in blood plasma and causing heart failure. Possums and rodents have a low tolerance to calcium, which makes them particularly sensitive. You do not require a controlled substances licence to use this poison.

### Brodifacoum

Brodifacoum is an anticoagulant (prevents blood from clotting) poison. It is produced in a cereal bait form. It should be used in weather-proof bait stations and replenished regularly. You do not require a controlled substances licence to use this poison.

### Feratox

*Feratox is the trade name for encapsulated pellets of potassium cyanide.* Feratox can be purchased from the Council's Animal Pest Management Section. Due to the ingredient's toxic nature, the law requires users to have a controlled substances licence.

### Cyanide

Sodium cyanide comes in the form of a paste and is an extremely lethal poison which can kill most pest animals if ingested in small quantities. If you have any questions or would like assistance with training to obtain a controlled substances licence, please do not hesitate to contact the Taranaki Regional Council.

### Phosphorus

Phosphorus is a liver poison. It must be used in bait stations and comes in a paste formulation. An apple prefeed is recommended before the poison is applied. Death is usually due to acute toxic hepatitis or liver damage followed by heart failure. A controlled substances licence is required to use this poison.

### 1080

1080 is tasteless, colourless and odourless which makes it undetectable to possums and rabbits. It can be used in paste, cereal pollard baits or applied to carrot. This poison is not available to the general public and any further information on this poison should be obtained from your local authority.

## SHOOTING

Shooting is more labour intensive than poisoning and is regarded by the Regional Council as unsuitable as an effective control technique.

If shooting is to be used .22 rifles and shotguns are the preferred firearms. All the necessary precautions must be taken when using firearms.

Possums can be identified by the red colour of their eyes at night.



Shooting from bike

## TRAPPING

*Trapping is an effective control technique but is very labour intensive and requires a high level of skill when using leg-hold traps.*

### Timms Traps

These traps are a relatively simple box-type kill trap. The yellow colour of the trap attracts the possum to the trap. A tensioned arm kills the possum once it places its head in the keyhole opening. Ideal for around houses or small holdings.



Timms trap

### Cage traps

These have the advantage of non-target species can be released without harm. A disadvantage is the animal must be destroyed using the most humane method available. These traps are suitable for around houses or small holdings.

### Leg-hold traps

These traps require a high level of skill to be used effectively. The target animal must be destroyed within 12 hours of sunrise the following day. In areas where native ground birds are present such as kiwi then the trap should be set higher than one metre above the ground.

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