

# Possums in the wild

## Trapping Tips

New Zealand is the best place on the planet for a possum to live.

Our introduced Australian Brush Tailed possum has no predators here and an incredible inexhaustible food source available to them. Tests have found that NZ Possums can browse on over 200 different NZ plants. They are also opportunistic omnivores that will feed on insects, young birds and eggs. This diverse diet and all year-round food allows them to grow and develop quickly.

Possums like all browsers seek out the highest sugar content food. They have incredible balance and are fearless climbers that appear to risk all to reach the farthest, most tender and sweetest new shoot or leaf at the end of the branch. Their strong tails and hind legs allow them to reach out to the tips of the branches, confident that if the branch gives way and snaps they will still not fall due to the added security of their extended tail – which is often attached to an adjoining branch.

You can see an example of how they use their tails in the video below. Both hands free while hanging. Also note how the possum easily jumps from branch to branch in the dark.

Highest populations tend to be along bush fringes where the young plants have full sun exposure plus fresh nutrients – resulting in higher sugar levels. Fruit trees, introduced grasses and clover are also right up there on their favourites list – especially when sweetened up with fertilizer!

This high availability of good suitable food especially in cleared out or low possum number areas means bait must be as attractive as possible and trap placement optimised. Strong scented bait is important as the possum's sense of smell is less developed than the other pests and depending on conditions only good for a few metres. A carefully placed small piece of apple, carrot or sweet corn nearby on the trail will help draw them in.

Luckily the possum is very inquisitive and having no predators, less on edge than the other pests – we just need to convince them that they are hungry and to go for it!

See our separate instruction sheet and video on how to mount and bait your trap.

It is important to mount your traps in full view, on clear pathways, ridges, spurs, along streams and bridges – runways along fallen trees work well. The base of your selected tree should be clear of any long grass or foliage that when wet will put the animal off. Having evolved in Australia the fur of our Brush Tailed Possums has poor water resistance – nothing looks quite as miserable as a wet possum! They avoid going out when it's wet, only doing so if they become very hungry and then only to feed in sheltered positions during the lulls. In cold wet southerlies where numbers have become higher than nest site capacity, possums often die outside full-house nests.

Possums follow trails especially when the ground is wet – sticking to the same flattened runway allows them to stay dry from rain or dew coated grass. These runway trails are easy to identify, especially where the grass is long.

Possums can spend most of their lives happily living in a tree as they do in big Rata trees which are full of all sorts of life and food – as long as there is a dry nest hole or epiphyte for shelter. This is often the situation in areas with high rainfall and where the dense undergrowth is wet for most of the time. The male still will go down on dry evenings in the dryer months and patrol his territory boundary which you can see as a pad runway circling the tree. If he comes across the scent of another animal, he will follow it and evict the intruder from his property. A well-placed trap near to the host tree will catch the male and in time, the female will come down.

With Possums as with most other animals you will occasionally come across a trap shy or dithering animal. A good way to entice them into your vertically mounted trap is to bait as per normal but not set the trap. This allows the Bait bar to hang down to the trap entrance so the animal can easily get to the bait. This is a particularly good way to catch other predators using the same trap after you have removed possums. Clear vertical or slightly leaning back trunks catch best, any ledge or branch below the trap tends to make the animal pause and sometimes go off the boil – as we would do if we paused and thought a little before doing a bungee jump! No dithering!

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Around July/August the young male possums are evicted by their parents mainly by the male – female not putting up much resistance with her new young one developing fast in her pouch. If you have removed the resident population from your control area the young male will move right through seeking other possum company. A possum on a mission can cover many kilometres in one evening. Well-placed traps where the possum trails lead into your control area will take care of the new arrivals.

It is best to move your catch as far away as practical. The possum decomposes quickly and makes great compost for fruit trees. Be sure to cover with pea straw or leaves in the wild and place in a cool damp spot. This will keep the flies and very importantly the wasps (during their protein phase) from utilizing the protein to boost their numbers.

This interactive trapping system will soon highlight the re-invasion hotspots in your area, so you can arrange and tend your traps accordingly. Freeing up time and allowing you to expand your control area (you could well be a trapping addict by now!) or just to enjoy the rewards – seeing and listening to the results of your efforts.

The Flipping Timmy Trap has been designed and engineered in New Zealand to suit our unique conditions. It is 100% made in NZ using the highest quality polymers and metal components. This ensures your trap is maintenance free and always performing at its full potential.

We hope you get as much enjoyment and satisfaction as we do with using Flipping Timmy.

**You can find more information on our website or contact us at [info@envirottools.co.nz](mailto:info@envirottools.co.nz)**