

INFO SHEET | PESTS 1

Brushtail possum

Trichosurus vulpecula



THE PROBLEM

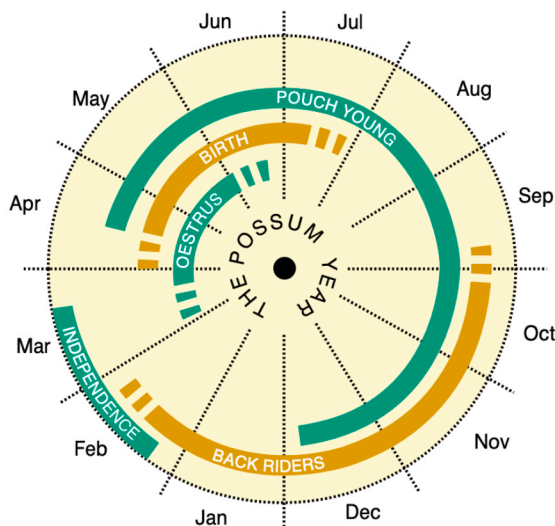
Native vegetation can be decimated by possums. They target favoured trees such as tree fuchsia, māhoe, rātā and kāmahī, killing them over time. They eat leaves, flowers and fruit in native and exotic forest, gardens or orchards. Possums are omnivores, also feeding on eggs, chicks, wētā and snails. They compete with our native birds for food and nesting sites. They also eat pasture and spread bovine tuberculosis (Tb) to cattle and deer herds.

HABITAT

Podocarp/broadleaf native forest is their preferred habitat. They can also become abundant along the edges of forest or scrub and pasture, and bush-backyard boundaries. Possums frequent vegetable gardens and fruit trees, flower gardens and specimen trees.



Possum (photo Nick Lambert, creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0)



Possum breeding cycle from: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/documents/science-and-technical/everybodyspossum.pdf>

CONTROL

The detection of Tb in a Dunedin herd in 2015 triggered landscape-scale possum control from Flagstaff across Mt Cargill to Heyward Point. OSPRI's contractors used traps and ground based toxins to reduce the possum population to very low levels. Otago Regional Council (ORC) lists possums as a pest species and has established several 'site-led areas', including across West Harbour/ Mt Cargill and the Otago Peninsula. Landowners in these areas cannot harbour possums and are legally required to maintain them to very low densities (2% RTCI). The Halo Project, on behalf of Predator Free Dunedin, and supported by Predator Free 2050, DCC, ORC and OSPRI now leads possum control across the area that was previously managed by OSPRI.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.doc.govt.nz/nature/pests-and-threats/animal-pests/possums/

www.orc.govt.nz/plans-policies-reports/regional-plans-and-policies/regional-pest-management-plan

BIOLOGY

Females start reproducing from one year of age and produce one joey per year, occasionally two if food resources allow. They can live for up to 12 years. They are solitary animals but have overlapping home ranges. For example, a resource-rich habitat in eastern Otago may support around 10 possums per hectare.



Possum damage to canopy trees. This photo is taken from a "photo point" and is revisited at regular intervals to monitor the impact of possums on Mt Cargill forest canopy (credit: Mammalian Corrections Unit 2017)

CONTACT US

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