

Possum Finds No 'Simmon Tree Here



The half-grown possum pictured above was found at Natural Bridges state park, far from the storied and well-sung habitat of the little mammal

which has entered its name in American speech (playing possum) and is known also as an article of food, particularly below the Mason-Dixon line.

animal life at Natural Bridges park, the picture of the half-grown one having been taken of one found there. They are mostly nocturnal and will seldom be casual

Along The Trail

by

ken legg

If you should come across an animal with a long face which ends in a pink nose, with ears naked and black, a white face with dark eyes that resemble holes burned in a blanket, with coarse grayish-white fur, and dragging a naked, scaly, flesh-colored tail, you have seen a possum.

One early writer, in 1616, describing the o'possum in Virginia, has this to say of the beast: "The opassom hath a head like a swine, a tayle like a rat, as big as a cat and hath under her belly a bag wherein she carrieth her yong."

The o'possum enjoys the distinction of being North America's only marsupial. This group of mammals includes the well-known Australian kangaroo and is unique among other American land mammals in that the female has a pouch in which to carry her young.

Young are born after a gestation period of only 12 days. Compare this with the period of development of other mammals and it can be understood why possum young are but 11 millimeters in length at birth and are called 'larvae' since they are naked and will continue to develop in the pouch.

The young crawl to the pouch where they remain 50 or 60 days, after which they become free but return during the following month.

After leaving the pouch the young are sometimes carried on the mother's back where they secure themselves by entwining their tails around hers.

The possum has a gait as slow as a snail, is eaten by men and owls, has no defensive mechanism other than a habit of feigning death (playing possum) and is possessed of neither cunning nor of ferocity. Nevertheless, it has thrived in its native range and has even extended that range.

They were introduced into California apparently as the result of an accident. In 1906 the species was taken in Los Angeles county. One group of five is known to have escaped from a San Jose jeweler in 1910, these possums having been imported from Tennessee.

The home of a possum is a hole; a hole in anything. It may be in a standing tree, in a hollow log, in a rock pile, or in the ground.

Possums are omnivorous, meaning that they eat both plant and animal matter. In fact there is very little that a possum won't eat. His love of fresh fruit has been recorded in song in "Possum up a 'simmon (persimmon) tree," and, like the coon, he is especially fond of green corn. He often tears down the stalks to reach the ears and is quite destructive.

A possum likes chickens, bird eggs, insects and other meat or meat products. He isn't particular about how fresh or how spoiled it is and likes to eat his way into dead cows and horses.

He in turn is eaten, especially in the south, by man, who, knowing of his love of carrion, catches him, incarcerates him for a month or so and fattens him up on a diet of vegetable food before executing him for the pot.

Possums are members of the

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★ ALL SPORTSMEN

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