

OPOSSUM, VIRGINIA

theZOO
LOUISVILLE

RANGE:

Originally found throughout the South-eastern U.S., however in recent years has made its way northward to Wyoming and westward as far as New Mexico.

HABITAT:

Prefers deciduous forest areas and prairie grasslands, marshes & farmland. Generally stay in areas with woody vegetation near water. Prefer hollow trees and logs for den sites.

SIZE:

Length: 25 – 40" (64.5 – 101.7 cm)

Tail: 10 1/8 – 21" (25.5 – 53.5 cm)

Weight: 4 – 14 lbs. (2 – 6 kg)

NOTE: Males are usually larger and heavier than females.

LIFE EXPECTANCY:

Normal lifespan in the wild is about 2 years.

REPRODUCTION:

- Gestation period is 11 to 12 days.
- Breeding season is from January to July and females stay in heat for about 30 days.
- Newborns are tiny and very underdeveloped, blind, & helpless with only the forelegs even partially developed. They are smaller than a dime and weigh about 1/5 of a gram (1/2,380 of a pound). Usually litters range from 5 to 21, however the mother generally only has 13 nipples in her pouch so only the first to make it into the pouch and attach themselves to a nipple will survive.
- When born the babies have to find their way to the pouch, and the only aid from the mother is to lick a trail towards the pouch for the babies to follow.
- The young stay in the pouch for approximately 2 months, remaining attached to the nipple for about 7 weeks.

DIET:

Wild: The Virginia opossum is an omnivore. It eats insects, lizards, mice, earthworms, snails, crickets, grasshoppers, a variety of fruits, nuts, seeds, grasses, and carrion.

Zoo: Prepared omnivore diet, variety of fruits, vegetables and supplements.

BEHAVIOR:

- Virginia opossums are solitary creatures.
- Can be found living both on the ground and in the trees.
- Mortality rate is high during the first year of life and the animals are not long lived.
- When opossums feel threatened they will "play possum", which is basically pretending to be dead. When playing possum they will remain still, will not blink, and their tongue will hang out. This will often make the attacker lose interest and leave. Typical predators would be foxes and dogs.

POINTS OF INTEREST:

- The term opossum comes from the Algonquin Indian word "Apossoun" which was that tribe's word for the animal.
- Although there are other animals referred to as possums in South America and Australia, they are not really that closely related to the Virginia opossum. True opossums are unique to North America.
- The Virginia opossum is the only living North American marsupial.
- They have a hairless, prehensile tail.
- Large toe on rear foot is clawless and opposable.
- Whiskers are highly sensitive and help in locating food and moving about in the dark.

PHOTO
COMING
SOON

Class:	Mammalia
Subclass:	Metatheria
Order:	Didelphimorphia
Family:	Didelphidae
Genus:	Didelphis
Species:	virginiana

OPOSSUM, VIRGINIA



STATUS:

Common

REFERENCES:

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/mammals/marsupial/Vaopossumprintout.shtml>

<http://www.americazoo.com/goto/index/mammals/4.htm>

<http://www.nsrl.ttu.edu/tmot1/didevirg.htm>

<http://www.enature.com/fieldguide/showSpeciesSH.asp?curGroupID=5&shapeID=1035&curPageNum=...>

<http://www.iwrc-online.org/kids/Facts/Mammals/ opossum.htm>

http://www.feps.k12.va.us/StratfordLandingES/Ecology/mpages/virginia_opossum.htm

<http://www.wildwnc.org/af/virginiaopossum.html>