

# OPOSSUM

## 1/4/07

<b>Scientific Name:</b>	Didelphis virginiana
<b>Size:</b>	The opossum is a small to medium-sized marsupial, about the size of a large house cat. Adults weigh 5 to 15 lbs, while newborn babies are about the size of a honey bee.
<b>Habitat:</b>	Opossums can be found throughout most of the United States and portions of Canada and Mexico.
<b>Identification:</b>	Opossum fur can be white or black, but is usually gray. Older opossums have a brown or red tone to their fur.

### Fascinating facts:

- The opossum is North America's only marsupial (female has a pouch) mammal. The female carries and nurses her young in her marsupium until they are about 2 to 3 months old; then they are carried on her back another 1 to 2 months whenever they are away from the den.
- The name "opossum" is derived from an Algonquian Indian word "apasum", meaning white animal.
- Opossums are solitary and nocturnal. They are usually slow moving. When they are frightened and unable to flee, they may fall into an involuntary shock-like state, "playing 'possum".
- The opossum is omnivorous. They eat insects, snails, rodents, berries, over-ripe fruit, grasses, leaves, and carrion. The opossums will occasionally eat snakes, eggs, corn or other vegetables.
- Opossums are usually immune to rattle snake venom, rabies and distemper.
- It has 50 teeth, more than any other North American land mammal.
- Its hairless tail is prehensile and is used for grasping branches, balancing and carrying nesting material. ***The opossum does not hang upside down by the tail, a common misconception.***



