



Northern and Yorke Region  
**Common Brushtail Possum, *Trichosurus vulpecula***  
Rare



#### Conservation status

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The Common Brushtail Possum is listed as rare under the State National Parks and Wildlife Act (1972) and is thought to be vulnerable in the Mid North and Yorke Peninsula districts.

#### Description

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Common Brushtail Possums are generally silver-grey in colour, with a pale to white coloured underside and a dark brown to black brushy tail. They grow to about the same size as a domestic cat. Males are generally larger than females.

#### Habitat requirements

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Common Brushtail Possums are found in Eucalypt and sheoak woodlands, but they do not seem to occur in mallee or open scrub formations. The number of possums in an area, and the size of their home range, is dependent on the availability of food and den sites.

Many Brushtail Possums have adapted to the urban environment where there is plenty of food, in the form of ornamental garden species, fruit trees and food scraps.

## Ecology

The Common Brushtail Possum plays an important role within ecosystems. The possums diet is herbivorous, consisting of leaves, flowers and fruit. Mistletoe is a favoured food source of many arboreal marsupials, including the Common Brushtail Possum. Common Brushtail Possums not only eat the leaves of mistletoe, but they also break off pieces of the plant while feeding, having a similar effect to pruning.

Tree hollows are the preferred den sites of the Common Brushtail Possum, but they will use other dark and confined sites such as dense vegetation, hollow logs, burrows or rock crevices. They will also use man-made structures such as chimneys, sheds and roof spaces.

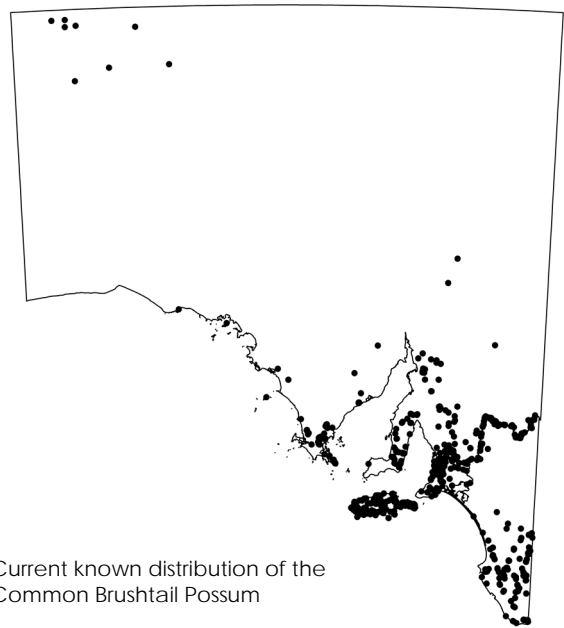
Common Brushtail Possums communicate with deep coughs and sharp hisses, particularly in the breeding season. Territories are marked out using scent glands located under the chin, on the chest and near the anus.

Although the Common Brushtail Possum has a mainly arboreal lifestyle, they also travel along the ground, during which time they are vulnerable to predation. Common Brushtail Possums tend to be solitary animals and highly territorial. Due to the possum's territorial behaviour, it has been estimated that around 70% of Common Brushtail Possums released into another area die due to stress, fighting or starvation.

## Distribution

This Common Brushtail Possum was once found throughout South Australia, however its range and abundance has significantly decreased due to threatening processes such as habitat loss and fragmentation.

The only areas the Common Brushtail Possum still appears to be common are in Adelaide, the Mt Lofty Ranges and on Kangaroo Island. It is thought to be vulnerable in the Mid North and on the Yorke Peninsula.



## Threatening processes

- Habitat loss
- Habitat fragmentation
- Loss of tree hollows
- Fox predation
- Relocation by humans
- Competition for food
- Change in fire regimes

## Conservation and recovery

- Retain tree hollows
- Provide more artificial hollows (e.g. nest boxes)
- Revegetate with local plant species

## How you can help

- Conserve native vegetation.
- Keep hollow bearing trees, including dead trees with hollows.
- Put up nest boxes.
- Do not relocate possums without advice and approval. A permit is required to trap and relocate the Common Brushtail Possum.
- Become involved in a local conservation group such as the Biodiversity and Endangered Species Team (BEST), phone (08) 8841-3402.

## For further information please contact

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