

# POSSUMS

*Trichosurus vulpecula*

## Management programme

Exclusion	Eradication	Progressive containment	Sustained control (excl. the Hūnua Pest Management Area)	Site-led (Hūnua Pest Management Area)
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## Impacts

Economic	Biodiversity	Soil resources	Water quantity/ quality
Human health	Social and cultural wellbeing	Amenity/recreation	Animal welfare

## Objectives

Reduce the numbers and impacts of possums particularly in priority possum control areas (PPCA) and on land adjacent to areas where possums are being controlled across the Waikato region.

## Why is it a pest?

Possums have a significant impact on many of the Waikato region's natural ecosystems. They prey on the eggs and chicks of various threatened and culturally valued birds, including kōkako, and compete for nest sites with hole-nesting birds, like saddlebacks and native parrots like kākā. They also compete directly with native birds and reptiles for food by eating the same buds, flowers, fruit/berries and nectar. Possums also eat invertebrates including wētā and are a significant predator of our native land snails.

Heavy selective browsing by possums can suppress or eliminate preferred plants. This can alter the vegetation composition in invaded ecosystems, ultimately leading to the collapse of palatable canopy species like kāmahī, pōhutukawa or northern rātā. Possums are also considered serious agricultural pests. They are vectors for bovine TB in cattle and compete directly with stock for pasture. They also have the potential to transmit diseases to humans.

## Responsibility for control

All occupiers within a Priority Possum Control Area (PPCA) in the Waikato are required to allow council staff and its contractors to monitor and control possums on their property (rules POSS-2 and POSS-3 of the **Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032**).

Areas within the PPCAs have been identified by our council as needing possum control in order to:

- protect and enhance biodiversity values (including improving the stability of catchments)
- enhance farm production
- maintain the gains of previous or existing possum control.

All PPCA control work is funded by Waikato Regional Council via rates. Waikato Regional Council also provides advice, information, and pest contractor contact information to those occupiers in the Waikato region who wish to control possums on their land but whose properties do not lie within a PPCA.

Extensive possum control is also carried out by the Department of Conservation (DOC) to reduce the effects of possums on protected public conservation land. TBfree New Zealand also controls possums in order to eradicate bovine TB. In many cases, the council and these agencies work together to manage possums.

## What do they look like?

Possums are generally similar in size to a cat but their size, weight (average 2kg to 3kg) and colouring can vary greatly throughout New Zealand. Males are generally larger than females. They are a marsupial, which means females carry their young in a pouch. Possums reach maturity at between 1 and 2 years old and have an average lifespan of 7-10 years.



- Possums have a small head with a pointed snout and oval ears.
- They have large eyes and catlike whiskers characteristic of nocturnal animals.
- Their thick, woolly fur is brown, silver-grey, black, or cream (or a combination of shades).
- They have a long black bushy tail.
- They have a darkly stained sternal gland on their chest.

## Good Neighbour Rule

Occupiers within the Waikato region are required to control common brushtail possums to a 5% Residual Trap Catch within 500m of land being managed for production and/or environmental purposes, where the adjacent or nearby occupier is taking reasonable measures to manage possums on the land they occupy (rule GNR POSS-4 of the RPMP 2022-2032).

## Auckland Council is responsible for a site-led pest management programme within the Hūnua Ranges Pest Management Area.

In relation to common brushtail possums in this area, no person shall:

- cause or permit common brushtail possums to be in a place where they are offered for sale or exhibited (without a permit)
- sell or offer common brushtail possums for sale
- breed, or multiply common brushtail possums or otherwise act in such a manner as is likely to encourage or cause the breeding or multiplication of common brushtail possums (rule HŪNUA-3 of the RPMP 2022-2032).

## No one is allowed to possess a live possum in the Waikato region (rule POSS-1 of the Waikato RPMP 2022-2032).

## Checking for signs of possums

- Discarded and partially eaten leaves, flowers and fruit beneath feed trees.
- 'Runs' (tracks) used nightly by possums to travel to and from feeding areas (very distinctive in grassed areas).
- Claw marks on trees, fence posts and gates.
- Bark biting (horizontal bites) on trees.
- Possum droppings (2.5cm long and slightly thicker than a pencil) scattered under food trees and in the forks of trees

## Discouraging possums

### Repellents, tree guards and fence barriers

- There are a number of repellents designed to deter possums and other browsing animals from damaging young trees, however, they do not provide total protection. Repellents are not practicable for tuberculosis (TB) control or protecting native forests.
- Tree guards are physical barriers used to keep possums from damaging young trees and seedlings. Sheet metal strips or bands (40 to 45cm wide) effectively stop possums from climbing a tree.

### Habitat manipulation

Reduce suitable possum habitat by removing piles of logs, dead trees and stumps. Where possible, block off entry into sheds, roofs and buildings.

### How can I control them?

There are a range of control tools available for possums, including trapping, shooting and poisoning.

Predator Free New Zealand and Bionet have best practice advice on their websites for landowners and community groups on how to undertake possum control.

You can also speak to one of our animal pest staff for advice and information on controlling possums on freephone 0800 800 401.

## More information

For information and advice on possums, contact Waikato Regional Council on freephone 0800 0800 800 401.

For information and advice on possums in relation to the Hunua Ranges Pest Management Area, contact Auckland Council on 09 301 0101 or email [pestfree@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:pestfree@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz).

## Web

- Private landowners' guide to possum control
- Predator Free 2050 Practical Guide to Trapping
- Possum facts and control tips by Predator Free NZ
- Possums by the Department of Conservation
- *Waikato Regional Pest Management Plan 2022-2032* – [waikatoregion.govt.nz/RPMP](http://waikatoregion.govt.nz/RPMP)

