They are Beneficial Too

Although opossums may cause damage to homes and gardens, they are also beneficial and an important part of our ecosystem. They feed on pests like rodents, cockroaches, snails, and slugs helping keep local pest populations under control. Since they are a foraging species, they also help keep neighborhoods clean of road kill and skeletons.

How can Vector Control help?

Trained technicians are available to conduct a home inspection at no cost and provide advice to homeowners on appropriate exclusion procedures, locate possible entry points, and provide guidance on repair. To schedule an inspection, please call the District office at (408) 918-4770, or submit a service request online at www.sccvector.org.

Please Note

The District does not respond to animals trapped by home/property owners. California Fish and Wildlife codes make it the responsibility of the home/property owner, or their agent to check traps and remove animals. If you are in doubt about doing this yourself, you may contact the California Fish and Wildlife or a wildlife trapper.

If you should decide to trap animals yourself, please call the California Fish and Wildlife for the current information regarding trapping. You may also contact your local animal shelter to recieve information on their current policy regarding receipt of trapped wildlife.

The District also does not respond to situations regarding domestic animals or dead animal pick-up requests.

Opossums

Opossums are known to carry ectoparasites like mites. We provide free insect identification and can help identify specimens for you. Email us a good quality photo, drop off a live specimen, or send it through mail. Contact us for more information.

Resources

California Fish and Wildlife
Bay Delta Region - (707) 428-2002
https://wildlife.ca.gov/

County of Santa Clara Animal Care & Control
Field Services - (408) 201-0660
Animal Shelter - (408) 686-3900
https://animalservices.sccgov.org

Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley
(408) 929-9453
https://wcsv.org/

County of Santa Clara Vector Control District
1580 Berger Drive
San Jose, CA 95112
M-F 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Office: (408) 918-4770
Fax: (408) 298-6356
vectorinfo@cep.sccgov.org
www.sccvector.org

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Opossums 

Didelphis virginiana) are often confused for “large rats” but they are marsupials (relative of the kangaroo). They are not native to California but were introduced to San Jose in 1910, and are now well established in the state.

They are about the size of a cat, have a pointed nose, small round ears, a prehensile hairless tail, and feet that resemble hands making them excellent climbers.

Females will carry their young inside their abdominal pouch for seven to eight weeks, after this the young crawl out and attach themselves to the mother’s back for about four months.

Opossums are generally nocturnal, although a steady supply of food, like pet food, can encourage them to come during the day time.

They are not aggresive and will not chase after people or pets, but will hiss or growl if they feel their food or den is threatened.

The opossum will also “play possum” where it rolls over on its side, shuts its eyes, slows its heart rate, and appears dead. This is a nervous shock reaction but they recover quickly.

Opossum Habitat and Food

Opossums feed on insects, snails, snakes, frogs, fruits, nuts, green plants, birds and their eggs, rodents, vegetables, pet food, and garbage.

They prefer environments close to streams or wetlands. In urban environments they can den under decks, porches, steps, attics, garages, or beneath houses.

Diseases

Opossums can carry a variety of diseases that can be transmitted to humans.

Leptospirosis - a blood infection often transmitted through the urine and feces of an infected animal.

Murine Typhus - transmitted through the bite of infected fleas.

If bitten by an opossum, bacterial infections can develop at the bite site rapidly.

They are often also infested with ectoparasites such as fleas, mites, lice, and ticks.

Opossums can cause serious damage to homes when looking for food or denning areas. They can tear heating ducts, chew on electrical wiring, and claw at overhanging rooflines.

Disappearing pet food left out at night and barking dogs may be a sign of their presence.

The best way to deter opossums from being attracted to your home is to remove sources of food, water, and shelter.

Clean up fallen fruits on a regular basis and fence vegetable gardens with poultry wire that is 4 feet high with the top 12-18 inches of the wire bent outward, away from the garden. The wire should not be attached to any support so that it bends under the opossum’s weight.

Cut back overgrown shrubs and trim back trees that overhang rooftops at least five feet from the roof’s edge.

Close off all potential entrances under the house, deck, porches, etc. with 1/4 inch mesh hardware cloth. For more detailed guidance, a home inspection, and other recommendations please submit a service request through our website at www.sccvector.org.