

# Fact Sheet

## About Operation Possum

### Operation Possum

Operation Possum is a community-based study of wildlife. It is being conducted by researchers from UniSA in conjunction with 891 ABC Adelaide. The study involves a public survey on the distribution of possums and their interactions with South Australian residents. The survey will begin in August and run for three months.

#### **Possum species**

There are five species of possum being studied in Operation Possum. Two are large species of possums that are commonly seen in South Australia:

1. *Common brushtail possums* are the size of a cat and have bushy, black tails; and
2. *Common ringtail possums* are the size of a small cat and the end of their tail is white.

There are also three types of pygmy possums (the word pygmy means small):

3. *Western Pygmy-possum*,
4. *Little Pygmy-possum*, and
5. *Eastern Pygmy-possum*.

Pygmy possums are about the same size as mice. They have fawn to reddish-brown fur and white underparts. It can be difficult to distinguish between these three species of pygmy possum because they are quite similar in size, colour, and shape. They are also very small and relatively fast-moving. Therefore, for Operation Possum, they need only be identified as pygmy possums.

### Public Participation in Operation Possum

All South Australians are invited to participate in Operation Possum. In addition to the online survey, participants will be able to upload stories and photos, ask questions via an online blog, and schools are invited to write reports on their findings. These methods of public engagement and data collection are being used as part of a Citizen Science approach.

Citizen Science is a method of scientific data collection that is becoming popular internationally because it allows citizens to contribute to scientific research while also increasing public awareness of science, scientific methods, and scientific research. In this case, the public of South Australia are being asked to record data on possums. Public participation is allowing scientists to gather a lot of information from a large area in a short period of time. Such data collection would be impossible without help from the public. We will find out where possums are living, how people interact with them, and what people think of living close to wildlife. Interactions with wildlife are an important way in which people can connect with the natural environment around them.

***Look out for possums wherever you go!***

