

HELP FOR BABY OPOSSUMS

Opossums are North America's only marsupial. The female carries and nurses her young (up to 13 at a time) in her pouch until they are about 2-3 months old.

Then they are carried another 1-3 months on her back when they are outside their den. They are omnivores that have been around since the days of the dinosaurs. They have 50 teeth, more than any other mammal, and their hind feet have thumbs, just like human hands.

Learning and discrimination tests rank them above dogs, and more on the level of pigs. They have a prehensile tail they use for balance when climbing or to carry leaves back to their den for bedding.

They do not, however, hang by their tail. They are solitary and nocturnal, preferring to avoid all confrontations. When cornered, they may hiss and growl or fall into an involuntary shock-like state ("playing possum").

Unfortunately, few live beyond 1 year of age in the wild as they are killed by many predators: humans (and cars), dogs, cats, owls, and larger wildlife.

If you find a small opossum that has been separated from its mother and its body is more than 8 inches long (not including the tail) it is old enough to be on its own! If it smaller than this or injured, it will need assistance.

If you have found a baby opossum, a young opossum with no mother, or you know the mother to be dead, here are a few guidelines:

- **KEEP YOUNG OPOSSUMS WARM.** Place the opossums in a box lined with soft rags and close the lid. They are very good climbers, so make certain that the lid is secure. If you have a heating pad, turn it on low and place half the box on top of the pad
- Place the box in a warm, dark, quiet area away from people and pets
- If the opossum's eyes have not opened yet, please get it to a licensed rehabilitator as soon as possible. Do not attempt to hydrate or feed it. It is very easy to aspirate a baby, which can be fatal.
- If the baby you have found is 4" long or longer, has its eyes opened and isn't lethargic, you may give it a little applesauce in a shallow lid. These emergency feeding instructions are only good for the 24-hour period it might take you to get the orphan to a licensed rehabilitator.