

# THE HOW AND WHY OF POSSUM CONTROL

## What is a possum?

The brushtail possum belongs to the group of mammals known as marsupials. Marsupials are mammals that have a pouch where the baby grows.

## What do they look like?

About the size of a cat, the possum has a long bushy prehensile tail, big dark eyes and big ears. They can be grey or black in colour.

## Where did they come from?

Originally from Australia, possums were introduced to New Zealand in 1837 to establish a fur trade. Today it is estimated there are about 50 million possums in New Zealand. That's 12½ possums for each of the 4 million people in the country – including you!

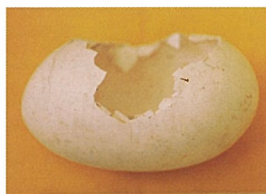
## How do they live?

Possums are nocturnal, arboreal animals. That means they are more active at night and spend most of their time in trees. During the day, possums can usually be found sleeping in dens.

## What do they eat?

Just about anything! Fruit, flowers, buds, bark, leaves, nectar, weta, snails and other insects. They also eat the chicks and eggs of some of our most endangered birds eg, kiwi, kokako and kereru.

It is estimated that New Zealand's 50 million possums chew their way through 20,000 tonnes of food every night! That's equivalent to about 28½ million loaves of bread – every night!



## How long do they live?

The life expectancy of a male is nine years and twelve years for a female.

## How do possums reproduce?

Females can breed from the age of one. They breed once a year, producing a single baby, called a joey. Once the joey is born, it crawls from the birth canal to its mother's pouch, where it suckles and grows for the next five months. The joey is dependent on its mother for about eight months.

## Do they have any predators?

Unfortunately here in New Zealand possums have no natural enemies. This is why they are such a problem and why we need to control them.



## FACTS & FIGURES



Possums are very well adapted for a life in the trees. They have forward facing eyes, sharp claws for grip, as well as a long prehensile tail that can grasp and is good for balance.

About \$80 million dollars is spent on controlling possums in New Zealand each year.

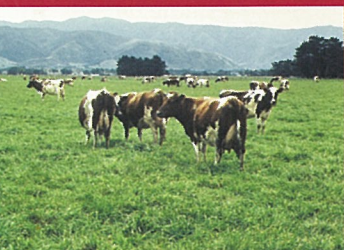
Possums will search out their favourite food and eat it to extinction. Some favourite plants are red mistletoe, pohutukawa, kohekohe and northern rata.



In 1998, before possum control had begun possums were destroying huge areas of native bush in the Waikato.



With the introduction of possum control the bush had a chance to recover. This is the same Mamaku in 2001.



Possums carry the disease bovine Tb (tuberculosis). Tb can make people, cows and deer very sick.

## POSSUM QUIZ

QUESTION	TRUE	FALSE
1. Possums usually breed once a year.		
2. Possums can live for up to twelve years.		
3. Possums were introduced to New Zealand in 1958.		
4. The possum is a carnivore.		
5. Possums carry and spread tuberculosis (Tb) to cattle and deer.		
6. Possums are arboreal animals and spend most of their time in trees.		
7. Possums have no natural predators in New Zealand.		
8. Possums have ultra sensitive whiskers.		
9. Possums are diurnal and only come out during the day.		
10. Possums have an excellent sense of smell.		
11. Young possums stay with their mother until they are two years old.		
12. Possums have a prehensile tail that they use to grab and hold on.		
13. The two thin claws on a possum's back foot are used for combing its fur.		
14. It is estimated that 2 million possums live in New Zealand.		
15. Possums only eat leaves.		
16. Possums will search out their favourite foods and eat them to extinction.		
17. Possums are members of the dog family.		
18. Possums are considered to be the most serious animal pest in New Zealand.		
19. Possums eat constantly throughout the night.		
20. Possums live in large groups.		



# POSSUM WORDSEARCH

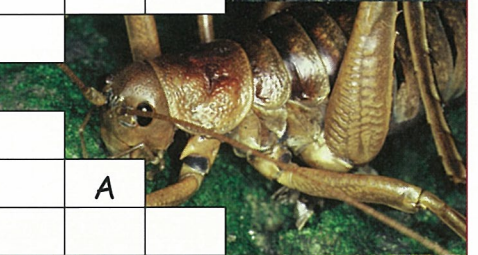
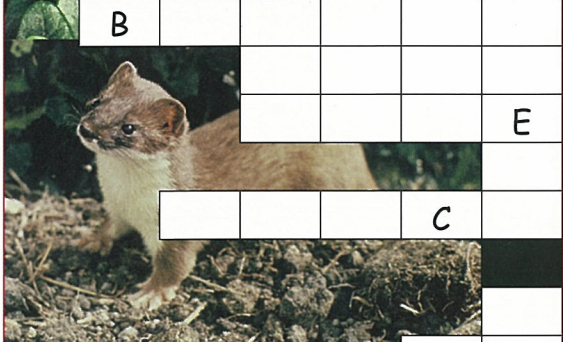
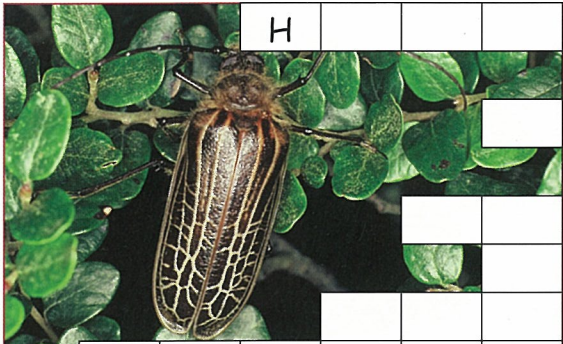
Find the possum related words in the wordsearch below.

Arboreal	Danger	Kereru	Omnivore	Sodium monofluoroacetate
Australia	Disease	Kiwi	Paste	Ten eighty
Bait station	Dye	Kohekohe	Pellets	Timms trap
Bark	Eggs	Kokako	Pest	Toxic
Brower	Flowers	Leaves	Pohutukawa	Tuberculosis
Brush-tail possum	Fruit	Mamaku	Poison	Weta
Buds	Fuchsia	Mammal	Pollard	
Bush	Green	Marsupial	Pouch	
Carrot	Introduced	Muzzle	Prehensile	
Chicks	Joey	Nectar	Rata	
Control	Kamahi	Nocturnal	Rewarewa	

H	P	O	H	U	T	U	K	A	W	A	Z	X	C	V	E	T	S	A	P	B	J	S
E	O	A	E	Y	D	U	R	E	R	E	K	S	F	G	D	H	J	K	L	M	O	N
S	I	Q	L	W	E	R	S	B	I	T	K	Y	U	R	R	E	G	N	A	D	E	I
A	S	G	S	L	H	T	J	U	W	C	M	L	A	M	M	A	M	L	I	P	Y	O
E	O	F	D	E	E	S	A	S	I	S	O	L	U	C	R	E	B	U	T	Z	X	C
S	N	O	C	L	V	N	E	H	K	J	L	W	Q	M	N	B	M	V	T	S	E	P
I	R	T	L	Y	T	A	C	U	I	O	P	A	S	K	A	M	A	H	I	D	F	G
D	I	E	M	B	I	N	E	B	P	E	V	C	O	X	O	U	Z	L	K	J	H	R
T	P	N	G	C	U	O	R	L	G	A	E	H	L	N	O	S	T	O	R	R	A	C
M	N	O	T	O	R	D	R	D	U	N	E	A	O	N	N	S	A	I	S	T	E	V
S	O	O	N	N	F	J	S	S	A	K	D	F	E	O	R	O	W	E	C	D	G	E
R	I	K	E	T	R	L	T	E	O	D	L	N	C	E	A	P	R	E	S	O	R	B
G	T	A	R	R	N	R	O	H	Z	U	T	T	S	X	C	L	N	V	M	P	B	N
O	A	K	O	O	A	U	E	W	O	Y	U	W	T	R	E	I	W	Q	A	R	M	T
L	T	O	V	L	M	N	B	R	E	R	O	V	E	C	X	A	Z	A	R	E	S	I
A	S	K	I	P	E	C	O	L	N	R	K	J	H	G	K	T	F	D	S	H	A	M
E	T	A	N	O	I	A	I	A	B	Y	S	W	T	R	G	H	E	W	U	E	I	M
R	I	Y	M	X	C	P	L	M	N	B	V	C	E	X	Z	S	Q	B	P	N	S	S
O	A	Q	O	E	W	E	T	E	N	E	I	G	H	T	Y	U	A	R	I	S	H	T
B	B	T	T	R	G	R	E	E	N	J	I	X	W	C	A	R	Z	O	A	I	C	R
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A	T	A	R	A	C	C	E	B	R	E	W	A	R	E	W	A	U	L	W	E	F	P
E	I	E	V	O	U	K	A	M	A	M	U	Z	Z	L	E	L	I	P	O	U	C	H



Identify the pictures and unjumble the names of these animals and plants to complete the picture crossword.



KNSIK  
UBEL UEGNPNI  
EBEBEBLUM

What do most of these plants and animals have in common?

The brushtail possum is a marsupial. Marsupials are mammals that have a pouch.  
How much do you know about marsupials? Find out by answering the following questions:

1. Where in the world do most marsupials come from?
2. A young marsupial develops and grows in its mother's .
3. Marsupial babies are often called .
4. List five other types of marsupial besides possums.



# POISON INFORMATION

## How to control possums?

Poisons are the best way for people to control possums over large areas because they don't require as much work as hunting and trapping. But it is important to remember that ALL these methods can be dangerous. On these pages we have used 1080 as one type of poison.

## What is a poison?

A poison is something that can make anyone sick. Poisons can hurt you if they are swallowed, tasted, touched, or just smelt. So it is really important that you never handle or taste something you don't recognise. The poisons used to control possums can also make pets very sick, especially dogs.



## How do I know where a poison has been laid?

Before a possum control operation is carried out letters may be sent to all neighbours of the area, information may be sent to schools in the area and notices may be placed in local newspapers. Also signs are used to warn people that poison has been laid in an area once the operation has been carried out. Signs usually use the words WARNING, DANGER and POISON in big red letters. Make sure you know what the signs in your area look like.

**If you do, wash your hands straight away.**

**Never touch anything unusual that is coloured GREEN!**

**1080 is a poison and all poisons are dangerous.**

**Always tell an adult if you see something that you think is a poison.**

## What do poisons usually look like?

The poisons that are used to control possums are usually mixed with grain, pressed into pellets (pollard) and are about the size of a ten cent piece. Others are spread as a paste and sometimes carrot is dyed green and coated in poison. The main thing to remember is that poisons are ALWAYS coloured GREEN!



\* Pellets



\* Carrots



\* Paste



## POISON ACTIVITIES

Colour this danger sign correctly.

DANGER

POISON  
LAID IN THIS AREA

DATE:

## ARE YOU A POISONS EXPERT?

1. All poison baits are dyed \_\_\_\_\_.
2. 'Pollard' is another word for \_\_\_\_\_.
3. If I see anything that looks like a poison I should \_\_\_\_\_.
4. I should always \_\_\_\_\_ from areas with poison warning signs.
5. A poison is something that can \_\_\_\_\_.
6. If I accidentally touch green baits I should \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Pollards are about the same size as \_\_\_\_\_.

## Break the poison codes

Find out what the messages are by using the decoder.

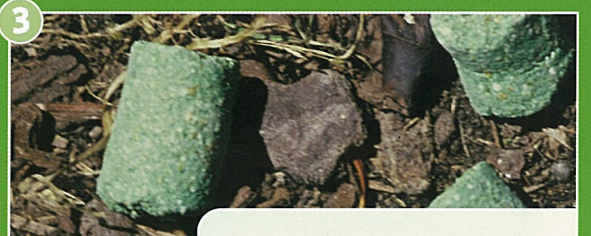
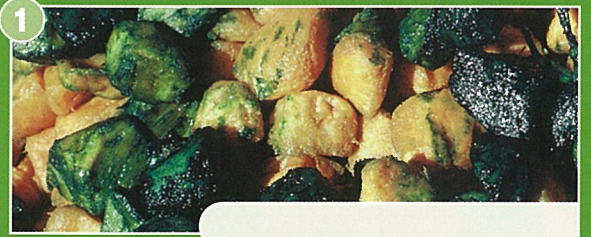
1. >\_J|\_ L\_J|\_ U\_ Jv\_J|\_,  
\_J|\_v|\_v\_J|\_ |> \_J|\_v, \_J|\_<!

2.  $\Gamma \langle \cdot \rangle \vee \langle \vee \Gamma \Box L \rangle \Gamma \Gamma \vee \Box \Box \Gamma \Box$   
 $- \Box L \rangle \Gamma \Box \Box \Box \Gamma \Box \Box L \langle, \Box L \Box \Box \Box \Box \Box \Box \rangle$

3. □□ ◁◻◁ ▢▣^◻ ▷◻◁▢◻◻ ▤▥◻◻◻◻ ▢▣▤▷▽  
▽▣▽▢ ◁◻◁◻ ▢▣◻◻▽ ▤▤◻◻◻▤▷◻◻◻.

## Spot the 1080 poison

What type of poison is shown in each of the images?



## DECODER

A	B	C
D	E	F
G	H	I

J	K	L
M	N	O
P	Q	R

	S	
T		U
	V	

	W	
X		Y
	Z	

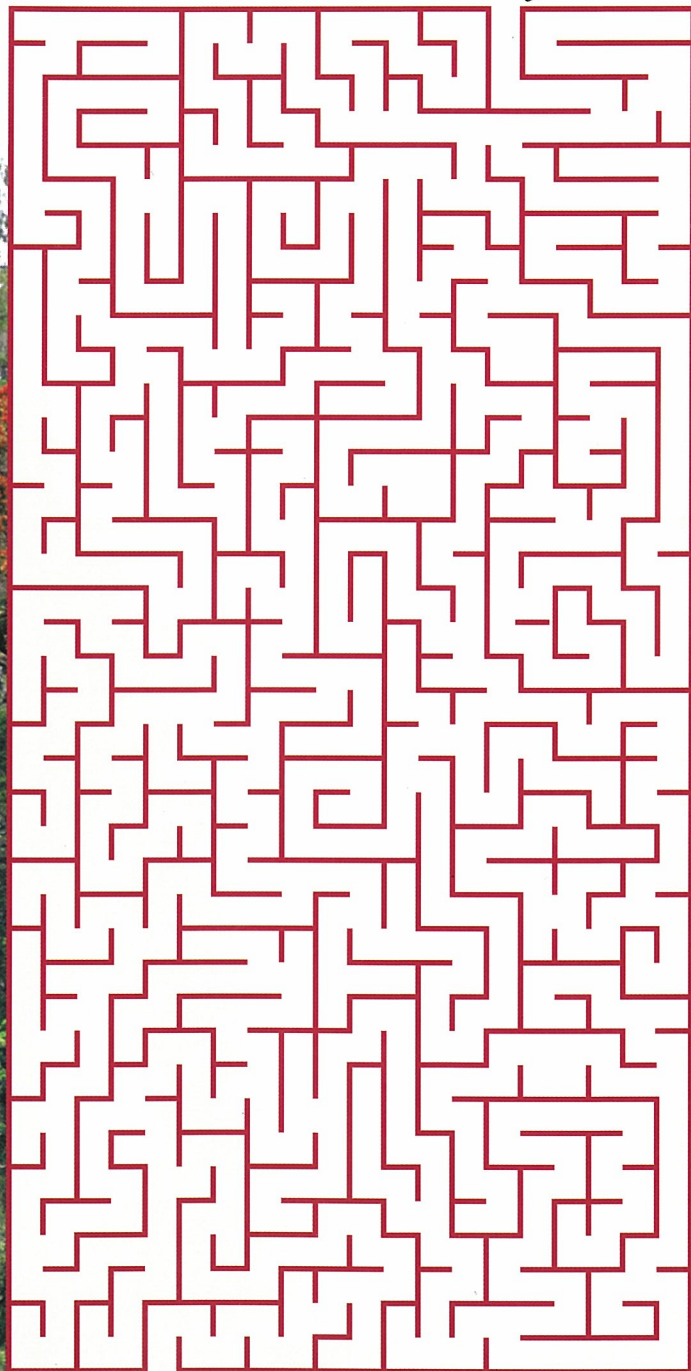
**Stay away from  
sign posted areas!**

**NOW PASS THE WORD!**  
Make sure your friends and family  
know about the dangers of poisons.



# MAZE

Help the native animals get back to the possum free bush!

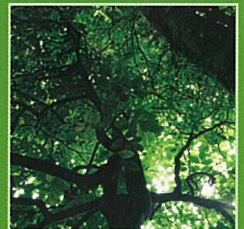


## POSSUM FOOD



Many native New Zealand trees are favourite possum foods. Find out a little more about each of these plants and how much danger they are in. What could you do to help protect them?

- \* Fuchsia
- \* Kamahi
- \* Rewarewa



\* Kohekohe



\* Rata



\* Pohutukawa

These native New Zealand animals also get eaten by possums. How threatened are these animals? Find an interesting fact about each one.



\* Kauri snails



\* Weta



\* Kiwi eggs



\* Kokako (chicks and eggs)



## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- \* Start your own possum awareness campaign.
- \* The introduction of pest species either deliberately or accidentally has been in the news a lot recently. Keep an eye on your local paper to find out more about this devastating issue.
- \* What animals or plants are considered to be pests in your local area? What is being done to control them? Why not volunteer some of your time to assist in some way eg, helping clear a local park of a pest plant.
- \* Design a poster explaining the dangers of poisons such as 1080, and how to recognise them ie, 'If it is green it is toxic, and if it is toxic, DON'T TOUCH IT! Ask your local library to put it up where everyone can see it.
- \* Design a poisons or possum awareness T-shirt. Print your design onto an old T-shirt.
- \* Create a pest awareness game that teaches people about the importance of pest control. Play it with your family.
- \* Get your class or school to adopt a piece of threatened bush or work to protect the native trees in your school grounds from being attacked by possums.
- \* Devise your own possum word search or crossword.
- \* Write a poem or story about possums and the damage they do or the dangers of poisons. Send it to your local paper to publish on their children's page.
- \* Finally.... Make all your friends and family, especially brothers and sisters know all about the dangers of poisons. SPREAD THE POISONS DANGER ALERT!

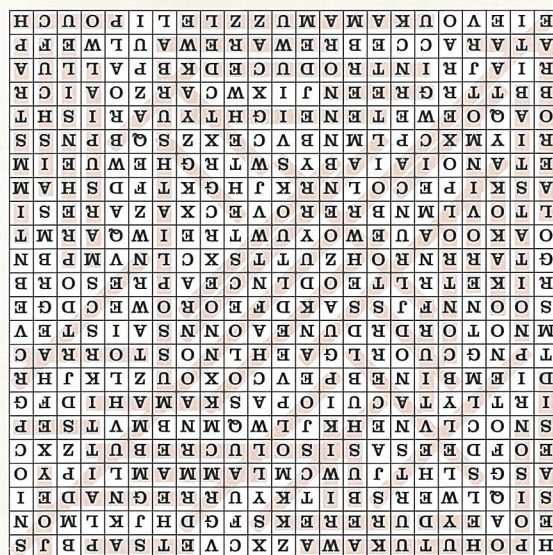
For more information visit our website:  
**[www.npca.org.nz](http://www.npca.org.nz)**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Photographs courtesy of the Department of Conservation.

Design by Bunkhouse graphic design.



Page 3, WORDSEARCH

coming together to mate.

during the night. \* 20. FALSE – they are solitary animals only  
pouched animals. \* 18. TRUE \* 19. FALSE – they only eat for 1-2 hours  
insects, chicks and eggs. \* 16. TRUE \* 17. FALSE – they are marsupials,  
50 million. \* 15. FALSE – they eat fruit, buds, flowers, bark, nectar,  
they are used for fighting. \* 14. FALSE – it is estimated there are  
– they stay until they are eight months. \* 12. TRUE \* 13. FALSE –  
TRUE \* 8. TRUE \* 9. FALSE – they are nocturnal. \* 10. TRUE \* 11. FALSE  
Southland. \* 4. FALSE – they are omnivores. \* 5. TRUE \* 6. TRUE \* 7.  
1. TRUE \* 2. TRUE \* 3. FALSE – they were first introduced in 1837 in

Page 2, POSSUM QUIZ

## ANSWERS

Page 4, PICTURE CROSSWORD

Huhu beetle, Rata, Puriri moth, Stoat, Pohutukawa, Stick insect,  
Weta, Brown kiwi, Saddleback, Blue penguin, Kokako, Black swan,  
Skink, Tuatara, Bumblebee

Page 4, MARSUPIALS

1. Australia. \* 2. Pouch. \* 3. Joeys. \* 4. Koala, Kangaroos, Wallabies,  
Wombats, Bandicoots, American Opossums, etc.

Page 6, ARE YOU A 1080 EXPERT?

1. Green. \* 2. Pellet. \* 3. Tell an adult. \* 4. Keep away. \* 5. Make  
anyone sick. \* 6. Wash my hands immediately. \* 7. A ten cent piece.

Page 6, SPOT THE 1080 POISON

1. Pollards. \* 2. Paste. \* 3. Pellets.

Page 6, BREAK THE 1080 CODE

1. Take care be aware, poisons are not kids' play

2. If you suspect poisoning – act immediately, tell an adult.

3. If you have touched green baits wash your hands immediately.