

# INVASIVE SPECIES ALERT!

## VIRGINIA OPOSSUM

(*Didelphis virginiana*)

### HAVE YOU SEEN THIS ANIMAL?

#### DESCRIPTION

- Robust mid-sized mammal (similar size as a house cat).
- Whiteish face with a pointed snout and largely hairless, scaly tail.
- Hairless, black ears with white/light coloured tips.
- Relatively dense fur with a grey, grizzled appearance.
- Lower legs and feet are black with white toes.
- The hind feet each have a large opposable toe.
- Average weight of a male is 2.7 kg, and a female is 2.1 kg.



Photo Credit: Jeremy Collison, iNaturalist, CC BY-NC 4.0

### REPORT INVASIVE SPECIES

Download the App!



[www.gov.bc.ca/invasive-species](http://www.gov.bc.ca/invasive-species)

### PRIMARY THREAT:

*Virginia Opossum consume almost all potential food they encounter and this may include some of B.C.'s species at risk. They also have the potential to spread disease to humans and other animals.*

### SPREAD

Virginia Opossum are thought to have spread into B.C. naturally from non-native populations in Washington. Opossums were originally introduced to the western U.S. as pets, for aesthetic reasons, as food, for sport hunting, and for the fur trade. Human-assisted spread is most likely to occur through unintentional transport within motorized vehicles/trains.

Virginia Opossum are known to breed twice a year in B.C. with a litter size of 5-7 young. They will eat whatever food is available including mammals, birds, insects and other invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, vegetation, fruit, and garbage. This variable diet lends to their ability to thrive and spread in human disturbed areas.

Virginia Opossum are found in a wide variety of habitats including grassland, forest, agricultural land, disturbed areas, and suburban/urban habitats. Riparian or other habitats close to water sources are preferred.



Photo Credit: Brian Lasenby

For more information: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/invasive-species>



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## DISTRIBUTION & STATUS

Virginia Opossum are native to central and eastern North America. The species current native extent spans from north-western Costa Rica, through Central America and the eastern United States, to southern Ontario and Quebec in Canada. The current range of Virginia Opossum in B.C. includes the lower mainland, Fraser Valley, and Hornby Island.



Photo Credit: Richard Coldiron, iNaturalist, CC BY-NC 4.0

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## LOOK-ALIKES:

The Virginia Opossum is the only marsupial found in the U.S. and Canada; its unique appearance suggests that it is highly unlikely that opossums could be confused for any other mammal in B.C.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Do not release Virginia Opossum in the province for any reason.
- Raise awareness to avoid further spread.
- Ensure your garbage is inaccessible to wildlife.
- **Report** sightings.

## DID YOU KNOW?

A Virginia Opossum will “play dead” during stressful situations such as a predator attack. They enter a catatonic state where the individual is immobile on its side, with its mouth slightly open and salivating. The duration of this state is variable, and recovery is quick once the threat is gone.



Photo Credit: Stan Tekiela

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