



## Ringtail Possum

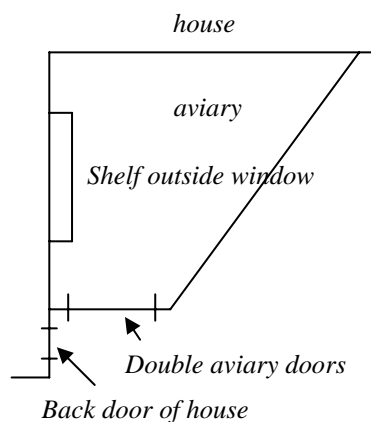
### *Pseudocheirus peregrinus*

The Common ringtail possum is a species known to many on the East Coast of Australia, mainly for eating roses or newly planted gardens. For those who detest and dislike them for that very reason I would argue these animals are abundant in suburbia and assisted due to human activities. My suggestion would be why not plant a native garden give them what they like to eat put up some nest boxes not only encourage them in, but encourage them stay.

Not many people realise how delightful this species can be in a captive environment. Compared to the more popular Sugar Glider - I personally find Ringtail possum the "easier" of the two species.

There are 4 sub species of common ringtail possum in Australia. *P.p. peregrinus*, Cape York to Kangaroo Island. *P. p. cooki*, coast scrubs of South eastern mainland. *P.p. con-volutor*, Tasmania and Bass Strait Islands. *P.p. pulcher* South eastern Queensland and Northern eastern NSW rainforest.

As many would already know I have an aviary built attached to the house which allows me to feed and interact with the animals from inside the house. Another aviary for great interaction with your possum is a large hexagonal aviary with a enclosed walk way leading along the house to a window, that the animal can come to the window and in when you want. Others use small inside enclosures and large outside aviary which you move your animals around depending on your requirements.



**Diet** - Ringtails are folivores eating mainly eucalypt leaves, flowers and fruit. The Common ringtail is caecotrophic (re-ingesting soft faeces of high nutritive value derived from caecal contents). This aids the animal in obtaining protein energy and vitamins that are lost due poor absorption in the caecum.

#### Diet used by Healesville Sanctuary

##### Daily Diet

##### Per animal

- 4g apple
- 4g pear or other hard fruits
- 4g carrot
- 3g banana
- 3g sprouted seed
- 6g fly pupae

##### Supplement

- 2g dog chow/eukanuba pet food kibble twice per week
- 1 almond shelled – 3-4 times per week
- 5g grated egg and cheese twice per week
- 5 sultanas – 3-4 times a week
- Native flowers e.g. banksias eucalyptus as available
- Fresh branches of foliage to eat.

**Fresh water should be available at all times**

#### Diet from Overton "Keeping Native Mammals"

##### Per animal - per night

\*increase during breeding season  
1/2 cup chopped fruit (apple, pear, banana, etc)

- 1 broccoli/cauliflower floweret
- 1 tbsp corn kernels
- Berries/Grapes/Lilly Pilly etc

##### Extras (every 2nd day)

- Sweet potato, Parsley
- 1 tbsp rolled oats
- 1 tbsp raisins, Sunflower seeds
- 1 almond

##### Optional (once a week)

- 1 x date, dried fig
- 1 x rice cracker
- 1/4 muesli bar/finger of bread

##### Ad Lib

Native Blossoms & Leaves (eucalyptus, banksias, acacia, grevilles, callistemon, leptospermum, etc)

**Breeding** - Mating occurs between April and December with most births peaking from May to July. The female has 4 teats and normally gives birth to twins, though the litter size can vary from 1 to 4. Some older females can have 2 litters per breeding season. Young remain in the pouch for 4 months and are weaned at 6 months of age. Ringtails reach sexual maturity at 12 months for males and 10-12 months for females. Ringtails live between to 3-6 years in the wild and up to 8 years in captivity. Always remember males cannot be housed together, if you do breed this species and your female produces male offspring, they may be difficult to house, you could end up with needing more enclosures to house individual males. Two years running one of my females had three pouch young, one year ALL males the next year one female and two males.

**Health** - As with any species good husbandry practices, clean enclosures, properly fed animals and enclosures not being over crowded, prevent the majority of disease and health issues animals will have. In the many years I have kept this species, I have needed a vet once, this was due to an older male ringtail falling and breaking his tail. The basics to look for in Ringtails is ectoparasites (fleas, mites) endoparasites (worms). Protozoans (toxoplasmosis).



Bloat has been observed in this species, which is build up of gas in the gastrointestinal tract, it will present as an extremely distended abdomen. Surgery may help if found in time, however most animals die. Bloat is easily prevented with a proper diet and plenty of native browse. For more in depth health information refer to *Australian Mammals Biology and Captive Management* by Stephen Jackson

**Enclosures** - DSE minimum enclosure size 5sq metres at 3 metres high for 2 animals with 1sq metre increased floor area for each additional animal. Enclosure sizes from, Jackson are 2.8L x 2.8W x 3H(M) space for each additional animal 2.0L x 2.0W(M)

When furnishing the enclosure make sure feeding areas and nest boxes are protected from the weather. I make a base structure of furnishings with vertical and horizontal branches at different heights in the aviary. Natural rope can also be used. Adding larger fresh branches in addition to browse always changes the environment, keeps the animals active and provides the possums with new materials to build their nests with.

For “nest boxes” you could use a nest box, hollow log, or possum ball. Do not remove logs from the wild the wild animals need them more. Nest boxes are easily replaceable and easier to clean and maintain. I know keepers who like and their possums love the possum balls, my possums removed all the fibre of the ball and took it into their nest box, so nest boxes it is. I provide two nest boxes at all times, I find the possums favour one but will alternate from night to night. I also know when my possums have been mating, for about a week in August they sleep individually, it is great cue that alerts me to pending pouch young.

**Introductions** - Ringtail possums are best housed in pairs - usually female and male. I would suggest that animals be introduced together into a new enclosure. Most of the time this is not a practical option, wash and clean the enclosure you have and replace all furnishings, replacing nest boxes would also be ideal. I have never had an issue with ringtail introductions. I have had a male be a bit nasty male offspring, my cue for “it was time to leave the nest”. Observe your introductions. There is no rule, it is different in every situation, every aviary and every pair of animals.



The Common Ringtail possum is a great marsupial species for those looking to keep their first marsupial. To get some experience with possums consider keeping two females. This is a species that is friendly and easily handled when adequate attention and care is given. Being hand raised is not a prerequisite to a calmer friendlier animal. A young parent raised animal can become as tame. I really believe it is the work you put in when you get the animal home, and for it’s entire life is what counts. If you are thinking should I get a Ringtail Possum or a Sugar Glider, I urge everyone to research both species. My hand however is up for the Ringtail.

by Amber Yarde

All photos where taken in the aviary mentioned at the start of the article



#### Further reading

Jackson, *Australian Mammals Biology and Captive Management*, 2003.  
 Kerle, *Possums, the Brushtails, Ringtails and Greater Glider* 2001  
 Strahan, *The Mammals of Australia* 2002.  
 Overton, *Keeping Native Mammals* 2001.



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