



*Image Michele Phillip*

## BRUSHTAIL POSSUM NEST BOX FACT SHEET

Congratulations for choosing your Possum box and caring for our wildlife. Together we can make a difference.

### DID YOU KNOW!

Brushtail Possums are nocturnal, becoming active at night feeding on eucalyptus leaves, and flowers, shoots, fruits and seeds of other plants.

The brushy tail is used as a fifth limb, giving it better balance when climbing.

Males have a scent gland on their chest to mark their territory. This gland is what causes the brown to red colour on its chest.

This possum can live up to 12 years in the wild.



The Brushtail Possum is a native marsupial and protected under the Victorian *Wildlife Act 1975*. It's natural habitat would provide a tree hollow for sleeping and breeding, however the landscape across the whole of the Bellarine Peninsula has changed, and continues to be changed on a daily bases, displacing many native wildlife. Natural tree hollows take over 100 years to form with the assistance from fungal and termite action. The loss of hollow bearing trees from across the Victorian landscape is now listed as a Potentially Threatening Process under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*. To start the natural tree hollow process on your property, if you have an older tree with significant branches, ideally cut the branch 600mm out from the tree allowing enough of the branch to begin the decaying process to allow a natural tree hollow to form. This unfortunately is a long process, but one we should start to consider now for future generations.

The Brushtail Possum to many are seen as a pest as they can be noisy on the roof at night, live in buildings during the day and upset many domestic dogs. Many sub-adult possums die when they are moving from their area of birth to establish their own home. A nest box in your garden will provide valuable habitat for this Possum.

We hope these simple tips will make yours and the possums nest box experience a positive and long lasting journey.

### **Step 1 LOCATION OF NEST BOX**

- The box should be placed in a safe location away from people, dogs, foxes and cats. Do not place a nest box on a property where there are cats. Cats are good climbers and will soon learn how to get access to the box.
- Choose a spot in a tree that is protected from the weather, including cold, rain and direct heat from the sun.
- Ideally the box should be fixed just south of east, about 110 degrees magnetic north, with the entrance facing away from the prevailing weather.
- The entrance to the nest box should not be sited over an existing tree limb or near a fork in a tree as this allows easier access by climbing predators.
- The box should be at least 3 metres from the ground and not totally exposed. If possible to be placed amongst foliage.

### **Step 2 ATTACHING THE NEST BOX**

- The nest box should be hung in a vertical position.
- Ensure where you propose to attach it to that the box will be firmly positioned and stable, with a slight forward lean that will assist young when exiting, and also help with drainage.
- Once you have your location, place a strong piece of wire through an old piece of garden hose that is long enough to cover the length of wire.
- Wrap the hose covered wire around the tree and the box and secure.
- If wanting to use another method, fix mounting blocks to the back of the box and use 100mm galvanised nails to attach directly to the tree. Ensure that when fixing mounting blocks that there are no sharp objects protruding inside the box. Attach the box on a slight forward angle which will assist young getting out of the box.

### **Step 3 MONITORING THE NEST BOX**

- Check the nest box from time to time a distance away as wildlife will be watching the box for some time prior to taking up residence.
- It is important not to disturb the box once mounted.
- It may take some time for wildlife to move into the box as there will be strange smells and the box may take some time to weather enough to blend in with the natural surroundings.
- Monitoring is important to enable you to evict introduced species that may take over the box. Introduced species such as Indian Myna birds, honey bees, sparrows etc will take over the box and sometimes even displace native animals.
- Nest building by introduced species should be discouraged. It is important to remove any nesting material or eggs from introduced birds. Removal of introduced bird nesting material and eggs should be done wearing gloves as these birds can harbour lice.
- Introduced bee's may also take over the nest box. If this is the case a beekeeper should be called to remove the hive from the box.

#### **Step 4 MAINTENANCE OF THE NEST BOX**

- As above removal of introduced species is critical.
- A well maintained box should have a life span of around 10 years.
- At least once a year check the box for any repair works and that it is still securely attached to the tree.
- Depending on how your box is attached you will need to check the health of the tree where the box has been attached, or if the growing tree is pulling apart the attachment points.
- The box should be securely sealed. Should gaps start to appear, they may be resealed using a non-toxic PVA glue when there are no young in the box and preferably done of a night whilst the adult possum is out foraging.
- Check the integrity of the floor of the box as well. Sometimes the weight of the animal over time will see the floor sag, requiring replacement or bracing.
- Should the box be close to the end of its lifespan, see if you are able to place a new box in close proximity to the existing box to entice the possum into the new box.
- Once the possum has moved into its new abode, remove the old box.
- The outside of the box should be painted with a non-toxic water based bark colour or natural green colour paint. This will help protect the wood, expanding the life of the box.

#### **Step 5 ENJOYING THE REWARDS**

- Don't worry if your possum box is taken up by other native wildlife, it just means they needed the home more than the possum.
- Any native wildlife in our yards is beneficial to our own health as well as the animals and provide a great learning curve for younger people about living with wildlife and observing these animals in their natural environment.
- Ensure domestic pets do not have access to the box or the wildlife when it is out and about foraging for food.
- Artificial feeds should never be considered as this encourages dependency, familiarity with humans and domestic pets increasing the risk of predation.

*Want to find out more about native wildlife*

[www.depi.vic.gov.au/plants-and-animals](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/plants-and-animals)

[www.zoo.org.au/MelbourneZoo](http://www.zoo.org.au/MelbourneZoo)

[www.gould.edu.au/wildlifecams](http://www.gould.edu.au/wildlifecams)



*Acknowledgements: Department of Environment & Primary Industries (DEPI);  
Gould League; Zoos Victoria; DPIPW Tasmania*