There are 23 species of possums found in Australia, two of which can be found on Phillip Island. Possums are native Australian marsupials. A marsupial is an animal which gives birth to immature young and the young continue their development inside their mother’s pouch.

Common brushtail possum
*Trichosurus vulpecula*

The common brushtail possum is the most widely distributed possum across Australia, being found in all states and territories. They are silvery grey in colour with cream underparts and a white to brownish-yellow belly. They also have a bushy, black tail, black around the eyes and a black band across the snout.

**Statistics**
- **Weight:** 1.5-4kg
- **Length:** ~35-55cm body—25-40cm tail
- **Average life:** 10-11 years

**Habitat**
Common brushtail possums are an arboreal animal, meaning they live in trees and are well adapted for climbing. Although naturally found in most forest and woodland habitats, common brushtail possums have adapted well to living in urban areas. They can commonly be found in roofs of houses in areas of urban sprawl where natural habitat has been removed. As they are nocturnal, brushtail possums make there home in hollows of trees where they will spend daylight hours, spending the night foraging for food to eat.

**Adaptations**
Like the koala, possums have two thumbs on their front feet to help them climb. They have a hand-like back foot which also enables them to grasp on to branches with all four limbs for climbing, as well as sharp claws and a strong, flexible (prehensile) tail for curling around branches. Common brushtail possums lead a largely solitary life, however they communicate to others through sound and scent. Their voice is a characteristic loud series of rattling nasal coughs and hisses.

**Breeding**
Common brushtail possums breed throughout the year, with most births occurring between March and November. The female gives birth to a single, furless young weighing only 2g after 17.5 days gestation. The young then makes its way to the mother’s pouch where it attaches to one of her two teats. The joey stays in its mother’s pouch for four to five months and then travels around by riding on her back.
**Statistics**

**Weight:** 0.6-1kg  
**Length:** ~32-38cm body 30-38cm tail  
**Average life:** 6-7 years

**Breeding**

Breeding for the ringtail possum usually occurs from April to November, with usually one or two litters a year. The newborn attaches to a nipple for approximately 50 days and then stays in the pouch for another four months. It then either stays in the nest or clings to its mother's back and is weaned by six months of age. Of all the 23 possum species, only with the ringtail possum is the care of the young often shared by the father.

**Conservation of possums**

The general decline of possums is thought to be due to logging and land-clearance, as these activities result in a loss of habitat. Dog and cat attacks, as well as being struck by cars, also results in many deaths of possums. You can help by keeping pets indoors after dark, driving slowly in wildlife areas, replanting habitat for them to dwell in, or placing a possum box in your yard. Pouch checks are also advised on any native animals that have been hit by a car. In the event of finding any sick, injured or orphaned wildlife, please phone Wildlife Victoria on 1300 094 535.