

When a possum comes into care and you call a wildlife carer, there are some basic questions that if you have the answers to, will help both with identification of the animal and finding a home quickly for it.

A baby possum is called a joey. Wildlife carers ascertain the age of the joey by weighing it.

If a baby is still in the pouch, particularly if the joey is unfurred, it is called a 'pinkie'. Pinkies come in various sizes. Should a dead mother with live babies come into your care, remove the joeys by placing a safety pin or paper clip through the skin of the teat, then cut the teat above the pin. **DO NOT PULL** the baby off the teat or it will die. Joey will release the teat in their own good time. This is more difficult to do with a glider baby, so a pin is not always used.

BRUSHTAILS - Over 65 grams for a brushtail is definitely a viable baby. Between 50 and 65 is hard work for a carer, but still viable. Between 40 and 50 grams needs a really dedicated experienced person, but below 40, consult with an experienced carer.

RINGTAILS – are not so much pink as a purpled-brown-pink. Over 45 grams is definitely viable. Between 30 – 40 grams is hard work, but still viable, below 30 consult with an experienced carer.

Please do not think you have a ringtail because it curls its tail up – ALL possums curl up their tails!

BRUSHTAILS – are a larger species – fully grown they will be a little smaller than an adult cat. They have a grey to grey/brown coat on top, and can be a soft cream to a beautiful 'pumpkin' colour underneath. Their ears are large and stand up from their heads. Tails are black and fluffy, (though not so noticeable in a joey) and sometimes have a white tip at the end.

Tails have a bare patch of skin underneath to help them 'hold on'. They can grow to be around 3 ½ kilo for a fully grown adult male. Average weight for an adult is 2 – 3 kilo. Anything up to 450 grams is still a baby, then a juvenile.

Release weight is 1200/1500 grams.



130 Gram Brushtail Joey



60 gram Ringtail Possum

RINGTAILS - are a medium sized species. Fully grown they are the size of a juvenile cat, or large guinea pig. They range in colour from a beautiful russet red to brown with a tinge of grey. Tails are very long, fully furred; often having a white tip which can range from just a couple of mm to 8-9 cm. Occasionally they have no white tip, or stripes. Ears are very small and close to the head. As a baby they look like little teddy bears. They are colony animals, and it is imperative for their survival that they are put in with other ringtails as soon as possible. They can grow to around 1kg in weight, average is around 800 grams. Anything up to 250 grams is still a baby, then a juvenile. Release weight is approx 550 grams, depending upon the weight of the smallest animal in the colony.

GLIDERS – there are several species of gliders, however, all gliders have a membrane running down each side of their body. Fur is exceedingly soft to touch. Differentiating between a *Sugar* and *Squirrel* can be tricky, but basically *Squirrel* gliders are a little larger. Both species have a black "GT" stripe from their head covering almost to the base of their tail. Gliders are a soft grey on top, with a



90 gram Squirrel Glider

cream belly. A *Squirrel* Glider can grow to around 260 grams in weight, average is around 180 grams. *Sugar* gliders are a little smaller as an adult. Anything up to 70 grams is still a baby, then a juvenile. Consult an experienced carer regardless of the animal's weight. *Yellow belly gliders* are a larger species of glider. Their fur is darker in colour, ranging from grey to black with a yellow belly or a cream tinge to their underbelly. Consult an experienced carer regardless of the animal's weight. Gliders are social animals, and need to be in a colony by the time they are juveniles.



Adult Feathertail Glider

FEATHERTAIL GLIDERS - are the smallest species. They are furred at around 4 grams. Their tail looks just like a feather or a fern leaf. It is a 'solid' tail, with frond like 'feathers' running off from it. Fully grown Feather Tails are approx. the size of a mouse. Many people mistake them for a mouse or a baby of another species. It is essential that you consult an experienced carer regarding these little ones.

GENERAL HUSBANDARY UNTIL POSSUMS CAN BE PLACED IN CARE

BABIES - Warmth is essential, especially for babies first into care. Please do not feed the animal unless you have consulted with a carer. If you feel the baby has been without milk for too long and you are unable to get hold of a carer, then use common sense when feeding. Use a syringe or an eye dropper to drip feed small amounts. Different weights take different quantities of Divetelact milk – make up as 1 scoop to 60 mls warm water, then use a **small amount** of this to feed the baby. Babies new into care are not used to taking large quantities as they are drip fed from their mother. For further information you can consult our website in the species section, possums, for weights/quantities.

Adult animals into care, if uninjured, should be left alone. Keep them in a quiet area, away from cats and dogs, and covered up. They prefer to be under a towel most times. Find out where they come from, as it is best for them to go back to their own territory if safe to do so.

Stress and shock are the two big killers of baby possums, especially ringtails and glider species, when they come into care. Keeping them warm, wrapped up and away from cat/dog smells and noises will lessen their stress and increase their survival rate. A drink bottle filled with hot water from the tap and wrapped in a towel and placed in with baby will give warmth if you do not have any other means of keeping it warm.

If you are unsure if you have a possum or a rodent, check the back feet. Possums have syndactyl toes (two toes joined together) for grooming. Ringtails have forcipate digits on their front feet – two toes on one side, a gap, then three toes. Brushtails have 5 digits on their front feet. All species have an opposable thumb on their hind feet. Rats have exceedingly long tails. Bandicoots have a long pointed nose and three toes on their feet.