

Urban Possum Control

Introduction

Possums were introduced into New Zealand from Australia in 1837 to establish a fur industry. Liberation and dispersal within New Zealand was influenced by public attitudes and government policy at that time. Due to a plentiful food source and a lack of predator's possums adapted successfully to a wide range of New Zealand habitats.



Possum

Possums consume woody plant species, shrubs and grasses. They will selectively feed on new shoots and leaves, eventually killing a tree. This results in permanent changes to the forest composition. They can also cause considerable destruction in nurseries, orchards and home gardens. Continued possum damage and predation to New Zealand's native flora and fauna is threatening some species.

They are also in direct competition for food with some of our native birds, including the Kaka, Kereru and Tui. They prey on nests, eating both eggs and young chicks. Possums carry Bovine Tuberculosis (Tb), a disease effecting cattle and deer. Bovine Tb can have a disastrous effect on our international trade.

Possums are nocturnal creatures, feeding at night and sleeping in nests or dens during the day. These nests can be inside roofs or house walls, in sheds, basements or under floorboards, in trees and bushes. The most important thing is that the nest site is dark and dry. Possums are now frequently seen in urban areas, in trees, running across streets or on roofs of houses.

A Possum in the House

Possums are able to climb the side of a house where they can gain entry by scratching an opening through loose or rotten weatherboards. Also by squeezing through any gaps between timber. Scratch marks and fur will often indicate an entrance to a possum den. If you discover a possum in your house at night do not chase it, damage could result to furniture, curtains, etc. Turn off the lights, open doors and windows to encourage the animal to go outside. Alternatively wait until morning, search the house, the possum will probably be under furniture or in a dark corner.

When picking up a live possum, grasp it firmly by the end of the tail, hold it well away from your body and gently swing it backwards and forwards.

Control Methods

Where your location permits, an effective option for possum control is the use of Pindone Possum Pellets. These come in cereal pellet form and are placed in special possum bait feeders. No pre-feeding is necessary as the possums will readily accept the bait. The pellets are lured, usually with cinnamon or in some cases lemon, no additional lure is needed.

Never lay poison in a public place, particularly with children around unless you have permission from the authority responsible for that land. Post plenty of warning notices.

If you are laying poison around houses always use bait feeders and make sure they are placed out of reach of children and domestic pets. Another alternative is to apply the bait late in the evening and remove it early in the morning.

Using Pindone Possum Pellets

These are ideal for use in situations where one or two possums are a problem. Bait should be placed in approved bait feeders and kept supplied to the possums until bait consumption ceases.



In urban areas when dealing with few possums one bait station located in the area the possums frequent is all that would be necessary.

Campaign Possum Bait

Campaign Possum bait is a cereal based bait, for use exclusively in bait feeders.

The active ingredient Cholecalciferol, acts by elevating plasma calcium levels, causing heart failure. As the possum's tolerance to calcium appears to be poor, it makes them particularly sensitive to this type of toxin.

Campaign is a single feed toxin, so there is no need for pulse feeding. The possum should stop feeding after ingesting the lethal dose of 10-15 grams, death usually occurs within 4-6 days. Carcasses pose low risks to scavengers and secondary poisoning is not an issue.

Feracol

Feracol is an oil based peanut/citrus paste, palatable to possums. The paste is dyed either green or blue and is dispensed in bait feeders. Cholecalciferol the active ingredient in Feracol is vitamin D3. In high concentrations it becomes very toxic to some animals, particularly possums and rodents. Cholecalciferol has been used in pesticide bait to control rodents for many years and is the same toxin as in Campaign Possum Bait.

Advantages of Feracol

The oil based paste is very palatable, stable and water resistant. Acute toxin prevents

prolonged intake of bait. Animals will die with a single lethal dose. Most possums will die within 3– 5 days, Feracol is considered to be a humane poison. Detoxification takes place in the carcass, thus virtually eliminating secondary poisoning. Feracol poses a low risk to humans and livestock, although it is very palatable and toxic to cats and dogs.

Wearing gloves is recommended. There is no toxic odour or dust given off from the bait. The bait should be removed from the container using a spatula or spoon. Care must be taken when placing bait to avoid access by pets. If accidental poisoning occurs with Feracol (Cholecalciferol) effective treatment can usually be given by a doctor or veterinarian.

Bait Feeders

Bait feeders are recommended for baiting possums, they have certain advantages, which include:

- Bait is protected from weather
- Less chance of accidental human contact
- They can be moved after use, cleaned and stored.
- They can be used continuously re-baiting at recommended periods for long term possum control.
- They can be used in areas where stock are present if placed out of animals reach.

There are various types of feeders available, Environment Bay of Plenty pest animal officers can help with your selection.

Using Bait Feeders

The most important thing to remember when locating bait feeders is to set them where children, pets and other livestock can't gain access to them. The feeders must be clearly labelled with the deadly poison sign.

Traps

See **Sustainable Options** Fact Sheet "Use of Traps for Possum Control" PA10.

Note: The section in the Fact Sheet PA10 on Leg Hold Traps does not apply for Urban Possum Control. It is illegal to use leg hold traps within city boundaries and they can only be used in rural areas.

The other sections relating to the use of Timms Traps and live capture traps are relevant to Urban Possum Control and can be used with successful results.



For further information and advice, contact your local pest animal officer at Environment Bay of Plenty:

Telephone: 0800 ENV BOP (368 267)
 Facsimile: 0800 ENV FAX (368 329)
 Pollution Hotline: 0800 73 83 93
 Email: info@envbop.govt.nz
 Website: www.envbop.govt.nz
 Address: 5 Quay Street, P O Box 364,
 Whakatane, New Zealand

This fact sheet was prepared by Ian Phillips

This fact sheet was last updated November 2003