



OPOSSUMS

MYTHS VS FACTS

Meet one of the most misunderstood animals.



MYTH

Opossums spread rabies.



FACT

Almost never. Their naturally low body temperature makes it very hard for the rabies virus to survive, so opossums rarely carry or spread it.



MYTH

A hissing, drooling opossum is about to attack.



FACT

It is all a bluff. Opossums are gentle and shy. When scared they hiss, drool, or "play dead" (a reflex they cannot control), then simply wander off. Leave them be.



MYTH

Opossums are just big, dirty rats.



FACT

Not rodents at all. The opossum is North America's only marsupial and carries its babies in a pouch. They are tidy groomers and gentle neighbors.



MYTH

Opossums are harmful pests.



FACT

They are quiet helpers. Opossums eat insects, slugs, snails, fallen fruit, and carrion, and they are even resistant to the venom of many snakes.



MYTH

Opossums eat thousands of ticks and stop Lyme disease.



FACT

The "thousands of ticks" figure came from one small lab study, and later research found little to support it. Opossums may eat the occasional tick, but they are not the tick vacuums the internet claims.

Source: Hennessy & Hild (2021), Ticks and Tick-borne Diseases

Found a hurt or dead opossum? Please check the pouch.

A mother's babies can survive in her pouch even after she has died, especially after a car strike. If you can do so safely, bring the whole opossum, mother and babies, to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator right away. Never try to remove or raise the babies yourself.

