Gliders and other possums

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Wildlife Preservation Society Queensland, Scenic Rim branch Inc.
Wildlife Tourism Australia Inc.
https://www.wildlifetourism.org.au
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Wildlife QLD Preservation Society of Scenic Rim

Wildlife Tourism Australia

Possums and opossums

	Opossums	Possums
Distribution	Only in the Americas	Only in Australia, PNG and extreme east Indonesia
Tooth structure	For **carnivorous** diet (although most do eat plant material such as fruit as well)	For **herbivorous** diet (although many also eat insects and some eat small vertebrates) – similar basic structure as kangaroos, koalas, etc.
Marsupial?	yes	yes

Common brushtail possum

This is the species most likely to be seen by residents, being found in forests and woodlands, suburban gardens and even city parks throughout the region, sometimes galloping across the roof at night.

Common brushtail possum

They are about the size of a cat and easily recognised by the pink nose, large ears and black bushy tail.

Like most possums they are nocturnal, live mostly in tree hollows and eat mostly a variety of leaves.

Common brushtail possum

However, they are very adaptable. They can also live in sheds, outdoor cupboards, ceilings etc. Their diet varies a lot more than most other possums, eating flowers, fruits, insects, birds' eggs and small vertebrates as well as the more usual array of native leaves.

They are very common in both town and wilderness.

Common brushtail possum

Those who have raised orphans (to be released into the wild when ready) know them to be delightful creatures with lots of personality.

Small-eared possum (bobuck)

Closely related, but restricted to rainforests and tall eucalypt forests, it has a similar brushy black tail, but is generally darker in colour and has smaller ears.

They feed on leaves and fungi, often foraging on the ground as well as in the trees.

Common ringtail possum

This is the other common possum in suburban areas, but also in rainforest and eucaypt forest and woodland.

They are smaller than the common brushtail and more restricted in diet, primarily eating a variety of leaves.

Common ringtail possum

They do however colonise towns quite readily if there is enough variety of native plants, and are very agile at tightrope walking across wires to cross roads.

Common ringtail possum

They typically build nests of plant material in the trees, but some have been found sleeping in odd paces such as large leafy potplants close to houses.

Pygmy possum

These are very cute tiny possums feeding on nectar and insects in many forests and woodlands, but unlikely to be seen by visitors.

They help to pollinate flowers of eucalypts, bottlebrushes, banksias and other native plants.

They can enter hibernation or a hibernation-like torpor during periods of food shortage.

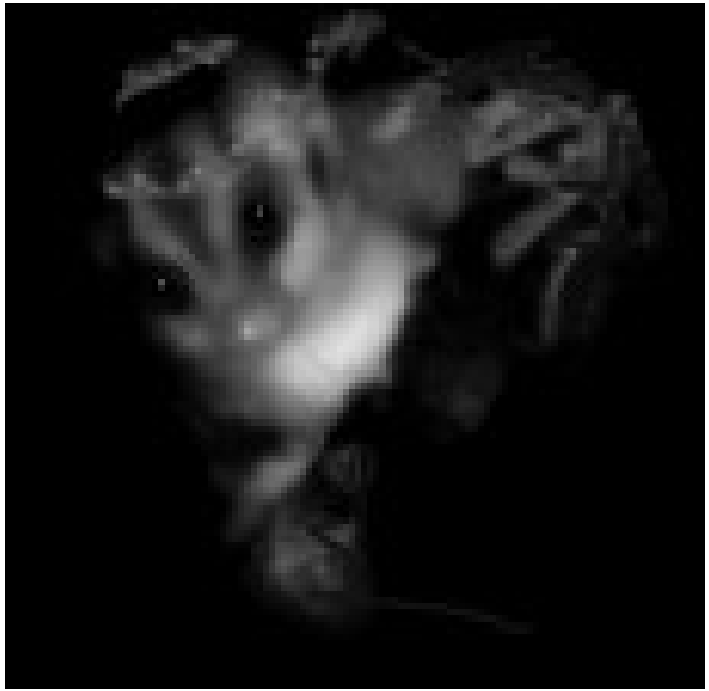
Why do some possums glide?

Most gliding animals are nocturnal. Diurnal squirrels can see clearly enough to take a long leap to precisely where they will land. Most nocturnal ones glide, adjusting their landing site as they get closer to their target

Photo: squirrel (Borneo)

Why do some possums glide?

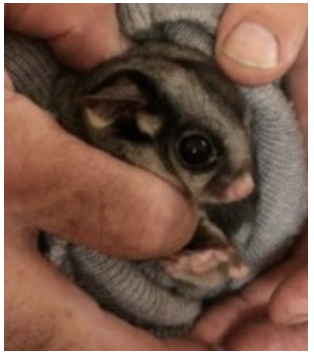
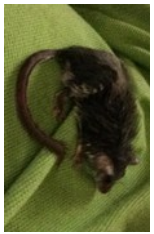
All possums are nocturnal, and some have also developed the habit of gliding, from at least three evolutionary lines



Gliders of Southeast Queensland

Greater, Yellow-bellied, Squirrel, Sugar, Feathertail



Gliders of Southeast Queensland

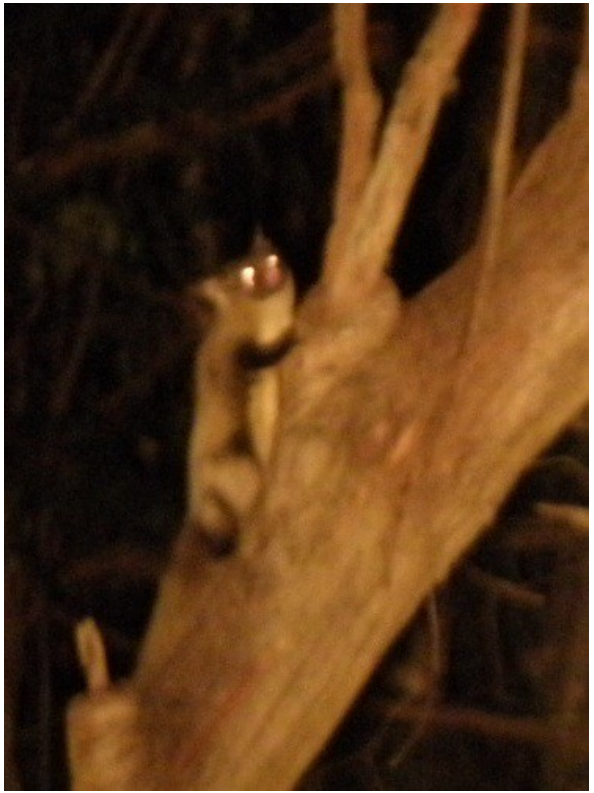
Greater glider

This is the largest and least active of our gliders, mostly found in tall dense eucalypt forests not far from rainforests. It is the only mammal other than koala that eats primarily eucalyptus leaves.

Gliders of Southeast Queensland

Yellow-bellied glider

The y-b glider is a bit smaller than the greater glider, and far more active an vocal. It makes v-shaped incisions in eucalypt bark with its teeth, to release sap on which it feeds (and smaller gliders often make use of these incisions as well). It is mostly found in tall eucalypt forest, where it feeds also on nectar, insects and sometimes fruits.



Gliders of Southeast Queensland

Squirrel glider

Unlike most gliders, the squirrel gliders is found mostly in low, relatively dry eucalypt forest and woodland, feeding primarily on nectar, sap and insects.

Gliders of Southeast Queensland

Squirrel glider

A project by the Scenic Rim branch of Wildlife Queensland a few years ago found many locations scattered across the Scenic Rim but often isolated from one another, leading to a major project on establishing wildlife corridors.

Gliders of Southeast Queensland

Sugar glider

Easily confused with the squirrel glider, the sugar is a little smaller, has a blunter nose, a sightly less bushy tai and sometimes (not aways) has a white tip to the tail.

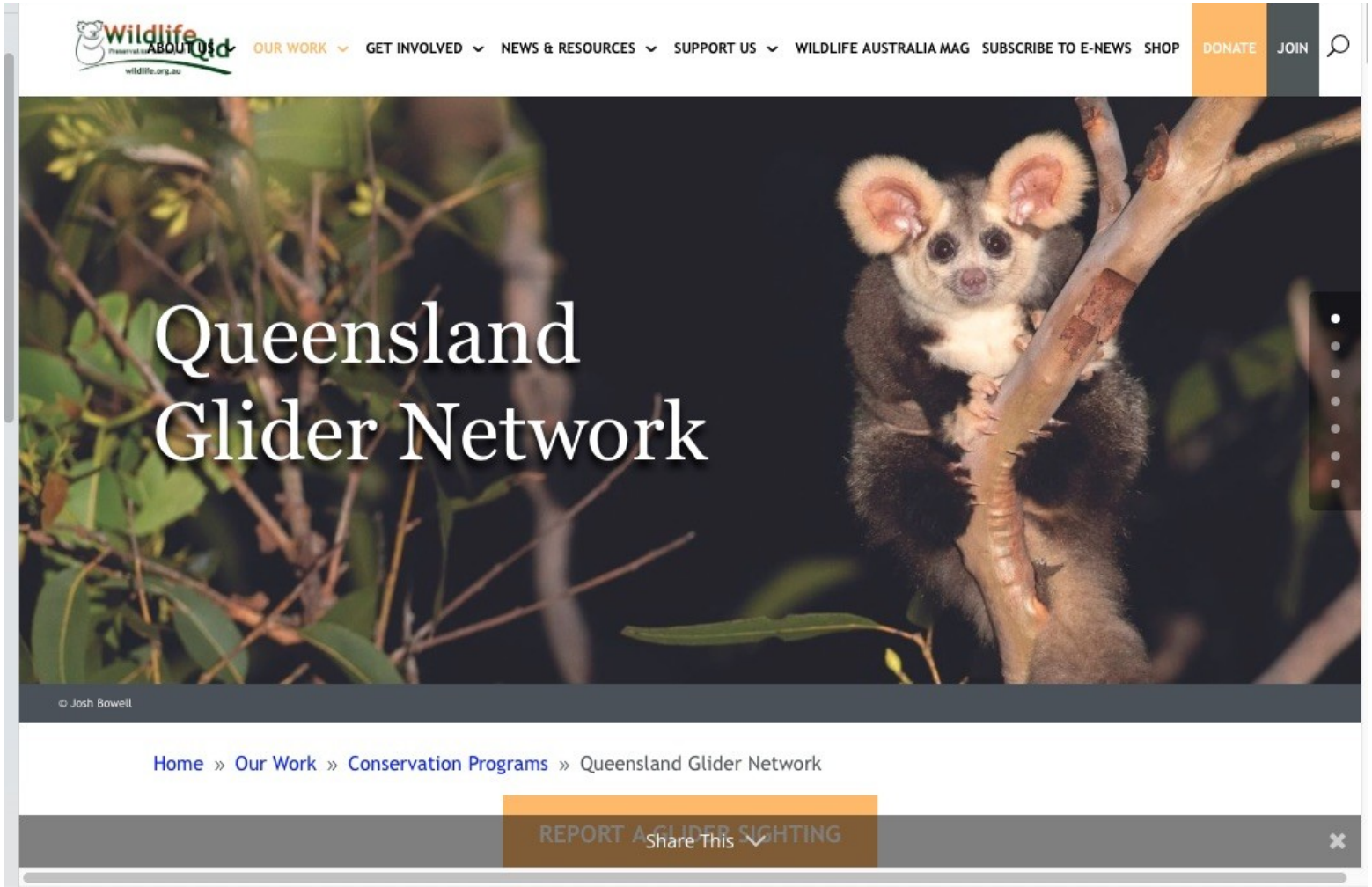
It tends to live in denser forests in the mountains, but in some places coexists with the squirrel glider.

Gliders of Southeast Queensland

Feathertail glider

This is the smallest of the gliders, about the size of a mouse. It is not easy to find unless actively feeding on flowers, but is probably quite common throughout SEQ.

The Wildlife Preservation Society of Qld has an actve program of surveying for our gliders and providing next boxes when hollows in trees (needed by all species) are scarce.



Where can we see them?

Common brushtails are often readily seen at night throughout SEQ in eucalypt forests, campgrounds, suburban gardens, city parks etc.

Where can we see them?

Bobucks (small-eared brushtails) may be seen around ecolodges near rainforests and tall dense eucalypt forest, especially on small-group tours with guides.

Where can we see them?

Common ringtail possums can be seen at night in rainforest, eucalypt forest, suburbia and in the city. They are browner and smaller than the common brushtail – the only other possum likely to be seen in a town - and have smaller ears and thinner tails.

Where can we see them?

Gliders are more difficult to find but can sometimes be seen near ecolodges such as Binna Burra (sugar glider) or Mt Barney Lodge (squirrel glider, feathertail glider).

Where can we see them?

Otherwise try:

- Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary
- David Fleay Wildlife Park
- Lone Pine Sanctuary
- Australia Zoo

for gliders

Treading lightly

- Don’t shine bright lights directly into their eyes. This can temporarily blind and confuse them. If you are not using a filter to decrease the glare, aim the light to one side and view the possum in the periphery of the light.

Treading lightly

- Walk softly. Try not to scrunch twigs or gravel underfoot, which can disturb not only possums but shy ground-dwelling creatures in the vicinity

Treading lightly

Don’t feed them.

There is a risk of spreading disease amongst them, or from human to possum, and they may fill up on inappropriate foods and not eat what they should be feeding on.

Those that are fed may also become a nuisance to other campers or local residents.

Treading lightly

- And at least one campground in SEQ reached the situation where so many campers fed possums that there was a massive overpopulation. Some needed to be put down by vets for incurable stress-related ailments.

Our possums are beautiful. Enjoy them gently!