

When a sick possum showed up in my garden my heart overtook my head. Is it ever OK to feed urban wildlife?

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Do animals ever come into your garden or yard? Which ones?
- Do you ever feed wild animals and birds? What food do you give them?

2 Key words

a. Find these words and phrases in the article and then match them to the correct definitions.

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. fear _____ | a. all the animals and birds that live in a certain place |
| 2. fence _____ | b. to keep someone or something safe from danger |
| 3. fur _____ | c. happening sometimes, but not often |
| 4. native _____ | d. the state of being scared because something is dangerous |
| 5. natural environment _____ | e. (of a part of the body) bigger than normal, usually because of injury or illness |
| 6. now and then _____ | f. large pieces of wood that go around a garden, field or house |
| 7. protect _____ | g. hair that covers the body of animals like cats, dogs or rabbits |
| 8. swollen _____ | h. to understand the importance of something |
| 9. value _____ | i. the place where plants and animals live naturally, without people |
| 10. wildlife _____ | j. naturally growing or living in a place |

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. My cat has soft, grey _____, and it feels nice to touch.
2. Your finger looks _____. Have you hurt it?
3. Our neighbours built a high _____ around their garden to keep the rabbits out.
4. It's common in Australia to see kangaroos and other _____ when you're driving along the road.
5. The Amazon rainforest is a(n) _____ for animals such as parrots.
6. Cody has a(n) _____ of spiders and doesn't want to go near them.
7. I _____ my friends because they help me with any problems I have.
8. When you ride a bike, you need to wear a helmet to _____ your head.
9. We go to the beach _____, but only when the weather is good.
10. Pandas are _____ to China and don't naturally live in other countries.

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Phoebe Loomes

20 August, 2025

- 1 I was cooking one afternoon when I heard something in my yard. I walked outside and, through the leaves, two black eyes appeared. It was a small brushtail possum. Its pink nose was swollen, and some of its fur was missing. I ran inside and picked up some fruit and put it on the fence. Over the afternoon, I watched the sick possum slowly eat. Then, at the end of the day, it put its head onto its chest and fell asleep.
- 2 Feeding native wildlife is a difficult issue. I called a wildlife rescue organisation and they told me to catch the possum and take it to a vet. My husband tried this, but the possum quickly ran away.
- 3 A few days later, it returned. But I was not keen on trying to catch the possum again. I worried that the stress might kill it. So, I started leaving food for it. Giving it pieces of apple and carrot seemed like a good thing to do.
- 4 Brushtail possums in their natural environment eat plants and leaves. This is why Clare McArthur from the University of Sydney says we shouldn't feed possums: "How good is [the food] we're feeding them? "If they rely on us, what happens when we go away?"
- 5 John Grant from the wildlife rescue organisation says feeding isn't helpful. "They can lose their fear of humans and cats and dogs," he says. "It's best to feed possums with natural food," McArthur says that giving a possum healthy food might not be so bad. "Now and then, it would be OK, because one of the good things is that we start to value the wildlife around us."
- 6 Professor Darryl Jones from Griffith University agrees that feeding wildlife can help people love them. "Only when people care about and try and understand the wildlife around us will they protect them."
- 7 Sometimes I still see the possum on our fence. It eats from my vegetable garden every few days. Some nights, it looks like there's been a possum party in our yard with fruit everywhere! My husband still leaves out an apple for the possum, even though we know we shouldn't. I still think it's ok to do that.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 20/08/2025

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3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and choose True or False. Correct the false statements.

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1. The author was preparing a meal when she first heard the possum. | True / False |
| 2. A wildlife organisation told the author to catch the possum, so it could get help. | True / False |
| 3. Professor McArthur says that it isn't a good idea to feed possums. | True / False |
| 4. According to John Grant, feeding possums makes them more afraid of cats and dogs. | True / False |
| 5. The possum still visits the author's garden to search for food. | True / False |
| 6. The author and her husband decided to stop feeding the possum completely. | True / False |

4 Key language

a. Find these phrasal verbs in the article. Then match them to the correct definition.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. keen on _____ | a. to need help from someone or something |
| 2. rely on _____ | b. left a place quickly, often because of fear or danger |
| 3. ran away _____ | c. to like or enjoy something very much |
| 4. go away _____ | d. took something with your hand |
| 5. picked up _____ | e. to leave your home to go on holiday |

b. Complete the sentences with the phrasal verbs from the previous activity.

- I'm not very _____ fish – I don't like the taste of it.
- We usually _____ to Spain in September.
- Sam _____ the phone and called his mum.
- I can always _____ my best friend to help me when I have a problem.
- We tried to feed the fox, but it got scared and _____.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- How does the author feel about the possum at the beginning of the article? How does she feel about it at the end of the article?
- Do you think the author was right to feed the possum? Why or why not?

6 In your own words

a. Work in small groups to create an infographic about an animal that is part of the urban wildlife where you live. Search the internet for common wildlife animals in your area, like raccoons, squirrels, possums, bats, beavers, etc. Choose one animal and create the infographic. You should include the following information:

- What the animal is
- Where it lives (e.g. in the trees, in the ground, in parks, by the river, in the city, etc.)
- What it eats
- When during the day you can see it
- What you should do when you see it
- Any other important information

b. Show your infographic to the rest of the class.