

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

## Level 2: Intermediate

### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Do wild animals ever come into your garden or yard? Which ones?
- If you found an injured or sick wild animal, what would you do?

### 2 Key words

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

- |                           |                                                                                     |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. advised _____          | a. a person who enters a place that they are not allowed to enter                   |
| 2. every so often _____   | b. gave someone an opinion about what they should do                                |
| 3. harm _____             | c. speaking or doing things with other people, usually in a social situation        |
| 4. harvest _____          | d. the fruit and vegetables that are collected when they are ready to eat           |
| 5. interacting with _____ | e. sick; ill                                                                        |
| 6. intruder _____         | f. to cause damage or injury to someone or something                                |
| 7. native _____           | g. made a loud, high cry, usually because of fear                                   |
| 8. poorly _____           | h. dangerous; likely to cause loss or damage                                        |
| 9. risky _____            | i. a piece of land that belongs to a person, group or animal                        |
| 10. screamed _____        | j. naturally growing or living in a place                                           |
| 11. swollen _____         | k. happening sometimes, but not regularly                                           |
| 12. territory _____       | l. to understand the importance of something                                        |
| 13. value _____           | m. (of a part of the body) bigger than normal, usually because of injury or illness |

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.

1. Andrea was feeling quite \_\_\_\_\_, so her boss sent her home from work.
2. Our dog barked loudly when it saw a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ trying to climb over the fence into the garden.
3. The injured boy \_\_\_\_\_ in pain on the ambulance journey to the hospital.
4. The weather has been very hot this summer, so we have a good \_\_\_\_\_ of strawberries.
5. It's too \_\_\_\_\_ to cycle without wearing a safety helmet.
6. I really \_\_\_\_\_ my sister's opinion when it comes to relationships.
7. Colin spoke to the team and \_\_\_\_\_ them to revise their presentation.
8. We only meet up \_\_\_\_\_, but it's really nice when we do get together.
9. Brittany's knee was \_\_\_\_\_ after she twisted it during the football match.
10. The Amazonian rainforest is home to many \_\_\_\_\_ animals such as armadillos and parrots.
11. When you start at a new school or new job, it's important to spend time \_\_\_\_\_ classmates or colleagues.
12. Looking at your phone screen for too long can \_\_\_\_\_ your eyes.
13. Eagles will naturally protect the \_\_\_\_\_ they consider to be their own.

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*While official advice is clear, it's not a black-and-white issue, experts say. Responsibly interacting with urban wildlife may increase our compassion*

**Phoebe Loomes**  
**20 August, 2025**

- 1 Chopping vegetables in my kitchen on a winter afternoon, I was startled by sounds coming from my back yard. I walked outside, prepared to face an intruder. Instead, after a few minutes of listening, I spotted it – a small brushtail possum by my garden fence. Through the leaves, two black eyes appeared. Its pink nose was swollen, and it had fur missing across its body. It looked like a poorly cared teddy bear left out in the garden.
- 2 I ran inside and grabbed a bag of frozen berries and dropped a few fruits on the fence. Over the afternoon, I watched the sick possum pick up berries and eat them. As the sun set, it put its head into its chest and fell asleep.
- 3 Feeding native wildlife is a difficult issue. I called the wildlife rescue organisation 'Wires', which advised us to catch the possum so it could receive care from a vet. As my husband slowly approached with an old bath towel, the possum screamed loudly and ran off.
- 4 Despite its terror, a few days later it returned. But I was not keen on trying to catch the possum again. I worried that the stress might actually kill it. So, I began leaving food for it. Providing slices of apple and carrot seemed like a kind thing to do. But regular food might harm an animal more than it helps.
- 5 Brushtail possums in a natural environment eat plants and leaves. This is why a professor of ecology at the University of Sydney, Clare McArthur, says feeding brushtail possums should be avoided: "How good is [the food] we're feeding them? "If they rely on us, what happens when we go away?"
- 6 John Grant from Wires says feeding is risky, too. "They can lose their natural fear of humans and domestic pets," he says. "It's best to feed possums (and native birds) with a natural food source." Male possums can also become stressed when other males enter their territory, which they naturally want to defend, according to a Taronga veterinary nurse, Anni Downing.
- 7 McArthur says giving a brushtail the odd piece of 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. So it's not a yes or no thing."
- 8 While advice on wild animal feeding is generally negative, Prof emeritus Darryl Jones from Griffith University agrees that interacting with wildlife can increase people's love for animals. "No wild animals in Australia need extra food," Jones says. "The reality is, millions of people every single day are feeding birds, and can't find any information. If you Google 'What should I feed my birds, you'll get lots of negativity," he says. "Only when people care about and try and understand the wildlife around us will they protect them."
- 9 Just under a year on, I still see the possum on our fence. It has taken to eating from my vegetable garden every few days. While I used to enjoy my own harvest, I now laugh at what the possum has chosen and wonder why it doesn't like some things. Some nights, it seems as though there's been a possum party. I wake to find fruit across our back yard.
- 10 And every so often my husband still leaves out an apple for the possum. Even though we know we shouldn't. I still think it's ok to.

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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. The organisation Wires suggested the author catch the possum so it could get help.                     | True / False |
| 3. Professor McArthur says that it isn't a good idea to feed possums, because they get used to being fed. | True / False |
| 4. According to John Grant, feeding possums makes them more afraid of domestic animals.                   | 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 expressions in the article. Then match them to the correct definition.

- |                     |                                                                                    |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. keen on _____    | a. to be dependent on someone or something for help or survival                    |
| 2. rely on _____    | b. to think that something or someone is important, and you are concerned about it |
| 3. taken to _____   | c. to like or enjoy something very much                                            |
| 4. go away _____    | d. to leave your home to go on holiday                                             |
| 5. care about _____ | e. started doing something often, usually as a habit or new behaviour              |

b. Complete the sentences with the correct form of the expressions from the previous activity.

- I'm not very \_\_\_\_\_ seafood – I just don't like the taste of it.
- We usually \_\_\_\_\_ in mid-September when children have gone back to school.

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3. Sam has \_\_\_\_\_ going to the gym three times a week.
4. I can always \_\_\_\_\_ my best friend to help me when I have a problem.
5. We should \_\_\_\_\_ our environment more because it affects us all.

### 5 Discussion

**a. Discuss these questions.**

- How did the author's feelings about the possum change over time?
- Do you think the author made the right decision to feed the possum? Why or why not?

### 6 In your own words

- a. Work in small groups to create a two-column chart, listing arguments FOR and AGAINST feeding urban wildlife using quotes and arguments from the article.
- b. Write a paragraph stating which position you agree with. Then present your ideas to the class. Decide whose ideas you think are the most convincing.