



WRNC Training

**Basic Wildlife
Rehabilitation Course**



Opossums



Jim Isaacs



Opossums

General Information

Marsupial

Solitary

Grow throughout their lives

Short Life Span

Low Body temperature

Resistant to rattlesnake venom





Opossums

General Information



Prehensile tail



Opossums

Stages of development in the wild

Born after only 13 days in uterus

Blind, hairless and partially formed

Crawl from vulva to the mother's pouch

Attach to a nipple

Remain attached for more than two months

Begin to leave pouch

Weaned and fend for themselves



Opossums

10-15 days





Opossums

20-25 days





Opossums

25-30 days





Opossums





Opossums





Opossums

40-45 days





Opossums





Opossums

Housing & Care



Opossums

Hairless embryos (pinkies)

Transfer to the pouch of a lactating female
with comparable size young if one is available

Do not try to raise outside of pouch



Opossums

Eyes closed, light covering of hair

House in a warm *humid* environment (damp wash cloth, paper towel or sponge)

Small container with ventilated lid (aquariums, plastic tubs, crab boxes)

Heating pad set on low under half of the container



Opossums

Eyes closed, light covering of hair

Provide pouch like sweat pants leg, heating pad cover or sewn flannel

Lanolin or olive oil can be used on tail to prevent dryness



Opossums

Older infants



Jim Isaacs

Move to a larger box

Provide a nesting box or hammock



Opossums

60 days





Opossums

Eyes opening, becoming well-furred





Opossums

Eyes open, becoming well-furred





Opossums

Eyes open, becoming well-furred





Opossums

Eyes open, becoming well-furred

Discontinue heat when thermo regulating

Large wire cage or screen covered aquarium

Provide nest area

Discontinue humidity



Opossums

Weaned and able to thermo regulate

Outdoor cage with nest box

Large enough to allow exercise

Branches and hollow logs

Secluded area

Food & latrine located to promote exercise





Opossums

Minimum Standards

	<u>Infant care</u>	<u>Nursing/Pre-weaned</u>	<u>Juvenile</u>
Opossums	(L) 10 GAL	(L) 3x3x3	(1) 4x4x8



Opossums

Feeding



Opossums

Feeding

	% Solids	% Fat	% Protein	% Carbo
Barker, et al.	23.2	11.3	8.4	1.6
Jenness and Sloan	24.4	7.0	4.8	4.1
$\frac{1}{\text{Esbilac}} + \frac{1/2}{\text{MMilk}} + \frac{2}{\text{H}_2\text{O}}$	21.7	10.5	7.3	2.3
$\frac{1}{\text{Esbilac}} + \frac{1/2}{\text{WCream}} + \frac{2}{\text{H}_2\text{O}}$	20.6	12.5	4.5	2.5



Opossums

Feeding



+



+

H₂O

1

1/2

2



Opossums

Feeding



+

H₂O

1

2



Opossums

Amount to Feed

Infants initially fed every 3 hours , eyes open 4 times per day

Feed 50cc per kg (.05cc per gram)

Should start lapping by around 50 grams



Opossums

Feeding

Formula Preparation & Storage

Mix fresh daily, refrigerate between feeding, heat only amount used per feeding, discard unused warm formula

Heat over hot water, don't boil or heat in microwave

Test temperature of formula. It must be warm

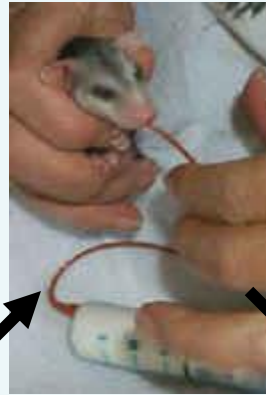
Don't use same feeding implement across litters

If water quality is poor, use distilled water



Opossums

Feeding



Use 2-box or
2-pouch procedure





Opossums

Tube Feeding

Why use it?

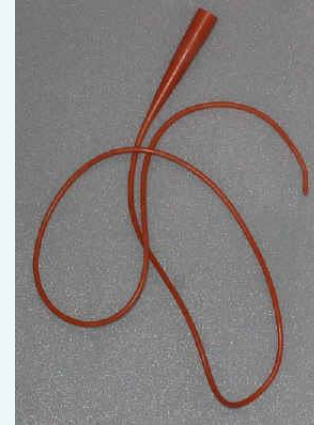
Used for infants and adolescents unwilling or unable to eat



Opossums

Tube Feeding

What to use?



For infants up to 60 days use a syringe with a French size 3.5 feeding tube attached

After 60 days can use a syringe with a French size 5 feeding tube attached.



Opossums

Tube Feeding

How to do it?

Learn how to insert feeding tube from someone who is experienced

If done improperly injury and death can result



Opossums

Tube Feeding Procedure

Do other procedures first (weighing & meds)

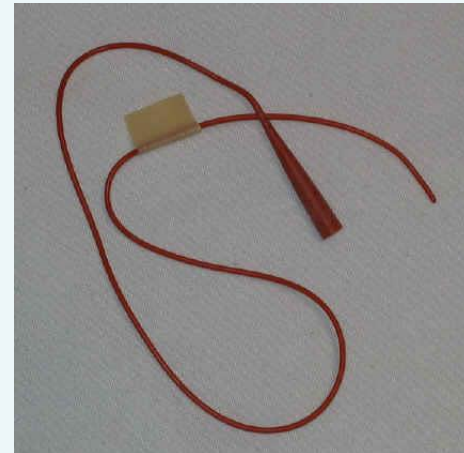
Stimulate

Measure tube

Tape tube

Attach tube to syringe

Release air bubbles





Opossums

Tube Feeding Procedure

Position animal

Insert tube and slide it down

Release fluid

Flush syringe and tube

Sterilize tube





Opossums

Weaning

Soaked high-quality cat chow & formula

Add vegetables, hard boiled eggs

Occasional fruit (low in calcium)

Natural foods





Opossums

Post-weaning diet



High-quality cat chow should be 90% of diet

Limit fruits (low in calcium)

Do not include meat without bones



Opossums

Post-weaning diet

Do Not add liver

Liver has excessive amount of vitamin A & D
Opossums need the calcium from eating bones



Opossums

Natural Diet

Insects

Mushrooms

Fruit

Bird eggs

Mice





Opossums

Release

Wary of people and afraid of dogs

Size and weight guidelines

Consider weather conditions

Site selection

Release at dusk





Opossums



Key Points

Provide humidity for young opossums

Learn to tube feed from someone experienced in doing it

Feed high-quality cat chow as the dietary staple (90% of diet)



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Opossums





Opossums

The End