



## Virginia opossum

*Didelphis virginiana*

Kingdom: Animalia  
Division/Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Mammalia  
Order: Marsupialia  
Family: Didelphidae

### FEATURES

An adult opossum has a head-body length of between 15 and 24 inches while the tail may be nine to 20 inches long. It has a pouch for the immature young to develop in after they are born. An opossum has long, coarse, gray hair, a white face and a long, pointed pink nose. There is dark hair near the legs. The ears are hairless. The round, hairless, prehensile tail helps with balance and climbing. An opposable toe on the hind foot also helps with climbing and grasping.

### BEHAVIORS

The opossum may be found statewide in Illinois. This mammal lives in woodlands, stream corridors, brushy areas and urban areas. The opossum is usually nocturnal. It is an omnivore that eats vegetation (fruit, grain and seeds), animals (insects, birds, eggs, reptiles and worms) and scavenged material (garbage, road kills). A threatened opossum will play dead, hiss or bare its teeth. The opossum has more teeth than any other land mammal. This shy and secretive mammal is a good climber and swimmer. The opossum breeds in late January and February, with most adults breeding a second time in May. The average litter size is eight. Young are born about two weeks after the eggs

are fertilized and are very immature. The average weight for a newborn opossum is 0.0056 ounce. The young move to the mother's pouch and attach to a nipple to complete development. They leave the pouch about two to three months later.

### HABITATS

- bottomland forests
- coniferous forest
- southern Illinois lowlands
- upland deciduous forest

### ILLINOIS STATUS

- common
- endangered
- threatened
- native
- exotic

### ILLINOIS RANGE

Permanent resident: statewide

Summer resident:

Migrant:

Winter resident:

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.

Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume 2: Woodland Habitats CD-ROM.