

IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

Arboreal Mammals of South-East Queensland



Resilient
Landscapes

National Environmental Science Program



UNIVERSITY of
TASMANIA 

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION

Possums



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COMMON BRUSHTAIL POSSUM

Trichosurus vulpecula ➔

SIZE | 50cm

DESCRIPTION

Stocky possum with silver grey to brown fur with pale belly, with some variation in fur colour. Long oval ears. Bushy tail that is darker than body colour. Patch of un-furred skin on lower part of tail base. Males can have reddish stained fur on chest. Large eyes and pointed nose. Pointy oval ears.

HABITAT TYPE

Various habitat types, from all forest types to urban areas. Common and abundant. Nests in large tree hollows and urban fixtures such as rooftops.



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Red/orange

SHORT-EARED POSSUM

◀ *Trichosurus caninus*

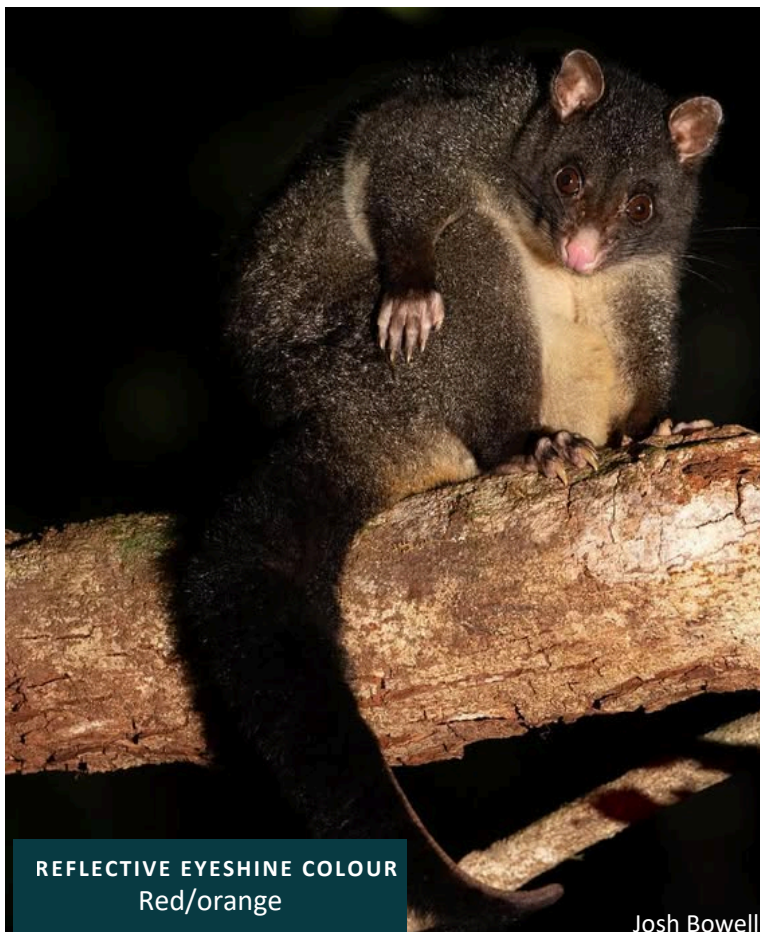
SIZE | 55cm

DESCRIPTION

Large and stocky possum. Steely grey to dark grey fur; generally with a paler belly, occasionally all black. Short, round ears, distinct to the Common Brushtail Possum. Slightly less bushy tail than Common Brushtail possum that narrows to a tip, with unfurred patch on lower part of tail base.

HABITAT TYPE

Prefers tall wet eucalypt forest and rainforests. Generally not found in urban or peri-urban environments.



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Red/orange

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SPECIES IDENTIFICATION

Possums



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COMMON RINGTAIL POSSUM

Pseudocheirus peregrinus ➔

SIZE | 30-35cm

DESCRIPTION

Variation in fur colour, ranging from soft grey tones to reddy colour with pale underside. Smaller than the Brushtail possums. Ears short and round, often with white patches behind. Curled tail that is prehensile and used to carry nesting material. Distinctive white tip on tail. Sometimes mistaken for rats.

HABITAT TYPE

Creates dreys (nests made out of bark, sticks and leaves) for sleeping in during the day. Found in a large variety of habitat types, including urban areas.

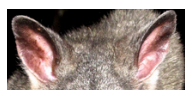


REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Yellow/white

IDENTIFICATION DIFFERENCES

Ear shape

Common Brushtail Possums have large long oval ears, whereas Short-eared Possums have round short ears, similar to Common Ringtail Possums.



Common Brushtail



Short-eared

Fur colour

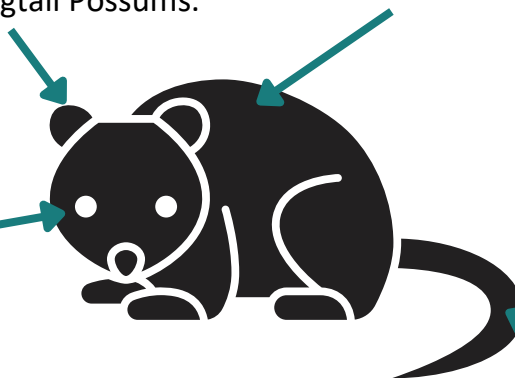
Short-eared Possums are darker than Common Brushtail Possums and Common Ringtail Possums.

Size

Common Ringtail Possums are much smaller than the Common Brushtail and Short-eared Possum.

Eyeshine

Common Ringtail Possums have a whitish eyeshine, similar to Greater Gliders, whereas Common Brushtail and Short-eared Possums have a more red eyeshine.



Habitat

Short-eared Possums tend to be found in wet forest and rarely in urban areas.

Tail

Common Ringtail Possums have a white tail tip and curled shape. Short-eared and Common Brushtail Possums have dark bushy tails.

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION

Small gliders



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SUGAR GLIDER

Petaurus breviceps ➤

SIZE | 16-21cm

DESCRIPTION

Small glider with grey/brown coloured body. Dark brown stripe travels from between the eyes down back. Pale underside of belly. Gliding membrane stretches from wrists to ankles. Blunt face with short broad ears. Makes a distinctive yapping noise that sounds like a puppy. Furry tail which can have a white tip.

HABITAT TYPE

Relatively common in a range of habitat types from rainforests to open woodlands.



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Soft yellow/white

SQUIRREL GLIDER

◀ *Petaurus norfolcensis*

SIZE | 20-40cm

DESCRIPTION

Medium sized glider with very bushy tail that is as wide at the base as the width of the body. Has a long and pointed face and pointy nose. Fur is grey/brown with dark stripe down back with a pale belly. Slightly longer, narrow ears. Tail is never white tipped, always dark tipped. Grunting call.

HABITAT TYPE

Found in a range of habitat types from woodlands, open forests and wet forests. Often co-exist with Sugar Gliders.



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Soft yellow/white

Josh Bowell

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION

Small gliders

FEATHERTAIL GLIDER

Acrobates pygmaeus ➤

SIZE | 6-15cm

DESCRIPTION

Tiny glider with a distinctive feather like tail that has stiff hairs. Tail often sticks straight out behind it and body forms a rectangle shape with membrane that stretches from wrists to ankles. Fur on back is usually brown to grey with pale underside. Large eyes and pointy nose.

HABITAT TYPE

Various forest and woodland types. Relatively common but hard to spot due to its size.



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Very faint white

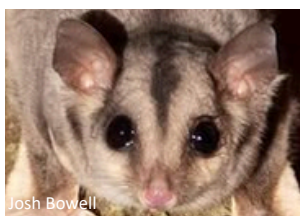
IDENTIFICATION DIFFERENCES

Nose

Squirrel Gliders have pointier noses with a pointier face. Sugar Gliders have a more rounded nose and snout.



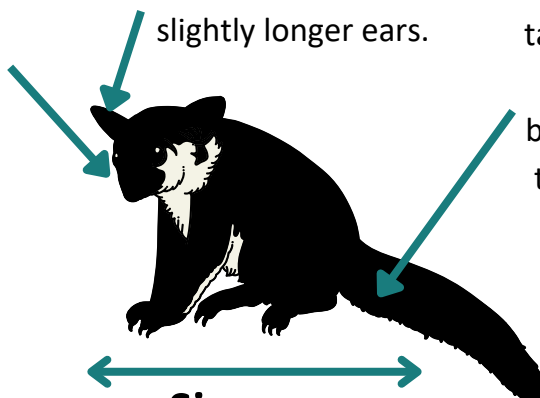
Sugar glider



Squirrel glider

Ear shape

Squirrel Gliders have slightly longer ears.



Size

Squirrel Gliders are larger than sugar gliders and Feathertail gliders are much smaller than both.

Tail

Squirrel Gliders have much bushier tails than Sugar Gliders, with the base of the tail generally as wide as the body. Sugar Gliders may have a white tip on the tail, where squirrel gliders only have dark tipped tails.



Feathertail
glider



Squirrel
glider



Sugar
glider

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION

Large gliders



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GREATER GLIDER

Petauroides volans ➔

SIZE | 60-80cm

DESCRIPTION

Range of colour morphs. Most commonly black with a white belly, but can range from mottled grey and cream to rarely pure white or pure black. Very long, fluffy tail. Short snout with very large, furred ears. Gliding membrane extends from elbow to ankle (unlike other gliders). Less active than other gliders, often shows a 'sit and stare' response when spotted.

HABITAT TYPE

Eucalypt forests with abundant large old trees with hollows. Often seen in high canopy.



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REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Yellow/white/orange

YELLOW-BELLIED GLIDER

◀ *Petaurus australis*

SIZE | 40-60cm

DESCRIPTION

Grey/brown body colour with a black stripe down back from forehead to tail. Gliding membrane stretches from wrists to ankles and has a black margin. Belly colour is lighter and yellows with age. Ears are long, black and unfurred, unlike Greater gliders. Tail is long, about 1.5x length of the body. Vocal and active glider with a loud distinctive screeching call.

HABITAT TYPE

Range of Eucalypt forests. Follows food sources including blossoming eucalypts.



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
very dull yellow/white

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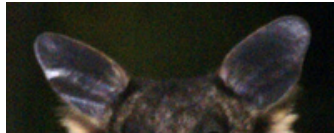
IDENTIFICATION DIFFERENCES

Ears

Greater gliders have very round large, fluffy ears. Yellow-bellied gliders have more elongated ears that aren't furred.



J.Bowell



J.Bowell

Eyeshine

Greater gliders have bright eyeshine, whereas Yellow-bellied gliders have a very dull eyeshine that is often not seen spotlighting.

Size

Greater gliders are larger than Yellow-bellied gliders, and appear more fluffy.

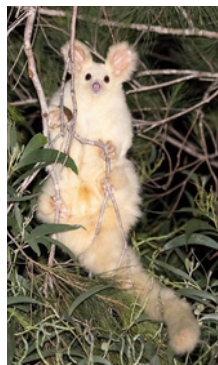


Colour

Greater gliders can be several colour morphs, such as white, mottled and grey. Yellow-bellied gliders are only ever dark with a yellow belly.



Yellow-bellied glider



J.Bowell



J.Bowell

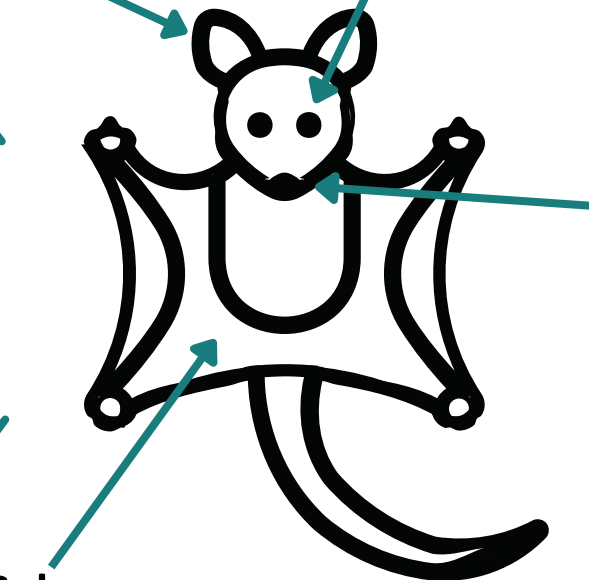
Greater glider

Call

Yellow bellied gliders have a very loud call and are vocal within family groups. Greater gliders are silent and do not vocalise.

Activity

Yellow-bellied gliders tend to be more active and mobile than Greater gliders. Greater gliders have 'sit and stare' response when seen spotlighting.



SPECIES IDENTIFICATION

Small mammals



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ANTECHINUS

Antechinus sp.

SIZE | 10-20cm

DESCRIPTION

Several Antechinus species co-exist. Difficult to distinguish. Species in SEQ include Yellow-footed antechinus, Buff-footed antechinus and Subtropical antechinus. Ears are distinctive with a double lobed '3' shape. In contrast, rats and mice have one big ear lobe. Very pointed snout and un-furred tail. Move very fast and are semi-arboreal.

HABITAT TYPE

Habitat ranges; yellow footed antechinus most common in SEQ, found in wide range of habitat, as with Buff-footed. Subtropical antechinus found at high altitudes.



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Soft yellow/white



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Soft yellow/white

RATS

Rattus sp.

SIZE | 15-20cm

DESCRIPTION

Native rats species coexist and include Bush rats, Pale field rats and Swamp rats. Invasive black rats are also commonly found across SEQ. Native rats generally have shorter tails than invasive black rats. Native rats tend to have rounder 'sweeter' faces than Black rats, and have more hunched and rounded bodies. Difficult to distinguish between Rattus species.

HABITAT TYPE

Wide range of habitats depending on the species. Semi-arboreal.

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION

Other arboreal mammals



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KOALA

Phascolarctos cinereus

SIZE | 75 cm

DESCRIPTION

Large round body and head with round fluffy ears. Thick grey-brown coloured fur on back with pale stomach. Large round black leathery nose. Small yellow eyes. Seen in forks of branches of eucalypt trees.

HABITAT TYPE

Restricted to eucalypt forest.



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Bright white/yellow

BRUSH-TAILED PHASCOGALE

Phascogale tapoatafa

SIZE | 30cm

DESCRIPTION

Uniform grey above, with paler belly. Large unfurred ears and a pointed nose with large black eyes. Conspicuous large bushy black tail extending to dark 'bottle brush' shape with hairs up to 4cm long. Seen climbing down trees head first.

HABITAT TYPE

Found in a range of eucalypt forests and open eucalypt woodlands.



REFLECTIVE EYESHINE COLOUR
Yellow/white

SPECIES IDENTIFICATION

Other arboreal mammals



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SPOTTED-TAILED QUOLL

Dasyurus maculatus

SIZE | 35-75cm

DESCRIPTION

Orange to dark brown fur with distinctive white spots across whole body including tail. Pointed snout and long hairy tail. Rarely seen. Semi-arboreal. Pointed face with long whiskers, short legs. Can be confused with foxes and cats. Musky smell.

HABITAT TYPE

Found in a range of habitats from woodlands to heath and rainforests.



Record sightings on iNaturalist

Use iNaturalist to record, identify and map sightings of wildlife in your area and contribute to scientific data collection.



Acknowledgements



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