

PROTECTING THE NORTHERN BRUSHTAIL POSSUM IN THE TOP END

PROJECT FACTSHEET

The challenge

The northern brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula arnhemensis*) lives in tropical savanna woodlands, monsoonal forests, and semi-urban areas (including Darwin) across the Top End. Nocturnal and mostly tree-dwelling, this possum commonly nests in tree hollows and eats leaves, flowers, and fruits.

The northern brushtail possum has undergone broad-scale decline over the past few decades due to threats including frequent and intense fires, grassy weeds, feral herbivores, feral cats, habitat loss, and degradation, and public misconceptions. These threats can combine to make one another worse.

The northern brushtail possum is listed as Vulnerable by the Australian Government and is a priority species under the Australian Government's *Threatened species action plan 2022–2023*.

Project goals

This project will:

- facilitate and support strategic management of threats to possums (particularly fire and weeds);
- improve understanding of where possums live and how they respond to management interventions; and
- increase awareness of the possum and its threats in urban and semi-urban areas, where it's often regarded as a nuisance.

We'll use a combination of habitat assessments and camera trapping surveys to collaboratively choose the best sites for management activities to improve possum habitat. Monitoring at key sites will tell us if the management activities are improving habitat or if we need to do something differently.



Working together

The project will work closely with First Nations ranger groups, Traditional Owners, community groups, private landholders, and other stakeholders to protect existing populations of the northern brushtail possum and its habitat across the Top End.

This project will run from May 2024 to June 2028.



Making a difference

The activities and outcomes of this project will directly contribute to several key actions outlined in the conservation advice for the species. We aim to fill knowledge gaps by enhancing our understanding of the distribution and habitat requirements of the northern brushtail possum through targeted camera trapping surveys.

The data gathered will inform threat management activities to protect possum habitat and contribute to ongoing monitoring. Community engagement and awareness campaigns will help improve public attitudes towards the northern brushtail possum and foster landholder-led possum-friendly improvements on their properties. A citizen science survey will improve our understanding of where possums occur across the Top End.



Next steps

We're currently having conversations and training workshops with First Nations ranger groups and Traditional Owners to foster interest and build skills for monitoring possum populations on Country. Next, we'll start participatory sessions to collaboratively choose sites where we'll carry out monitoring and management activities. We're planning to begin camera trapping surveys in the 2025 dry season.

We've started identifying landholders in the Greater Darwin region where we can support activities to improve possum habitat and carry out monitoring. Next we will be launching our community campaign to raise awareness of the status and threats of the northern brushtail possum in the Greater Darwin region.



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Australian Government



More information

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