



The first captive Leadbeater's Possum, Melbourne Zoo, 1961



Kasia, died in Toronto Zoo in 2010

#### LOST AND FOUND

Leadbeater's Possum was first described in 1867 from specimens collected in the Bass River area (east of Westernport Bay). It was named after John Leadbeater the museum taxidermist who prepared the specimens. Over the next forty years only two additional animals were collected and by then much of the vegetation in the area had been cleared and the swamps drained for agriculture. In 1960 the species was declared 'almost certainly' extinct. Early the following year, Eric Wilkinson, who had conducted fauna surveys for several years, rediscovered the possum at Cambarville and Tommy's Bend, near Marysville, in the Central Highlands, a region where the animal had not previously been recorded. Since then it has been recorded at many other localities, all of which are threatened by logging and/or bushfires. As we marked the 50th Anniversary of Rediscovery in 2011 the population was declining. There may now be as few as 1000 Leadbeater's Possums left in the wild.

**BECOME A FRIEND OF LEADBEATER'S**  
Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc. was established in 2004 to give a voice to these amazing but elusive forest animals. Leadbeater's Possum habitat is impacted by timber harvesting (including salvage logging), bushfires, fire prevention activities (burn-offs and firebreaks) and climate change.

We aim to help Leadbeater's survive in the wild by encouraging public awareness, supporting conservation efforts, providing nest boxes and emergency winter feeding, research programs and effective conservation strategies and policies.



### Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc.

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Join us at:

[www.leadbeaters.org.au](http://www.leadbeaters.org.au)

or write to [info@leadbeaters.org.au](mailto:info@leadbeaters.org.au)

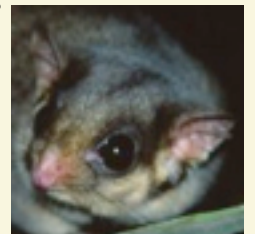
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# LEADBEATER'S POSSUM



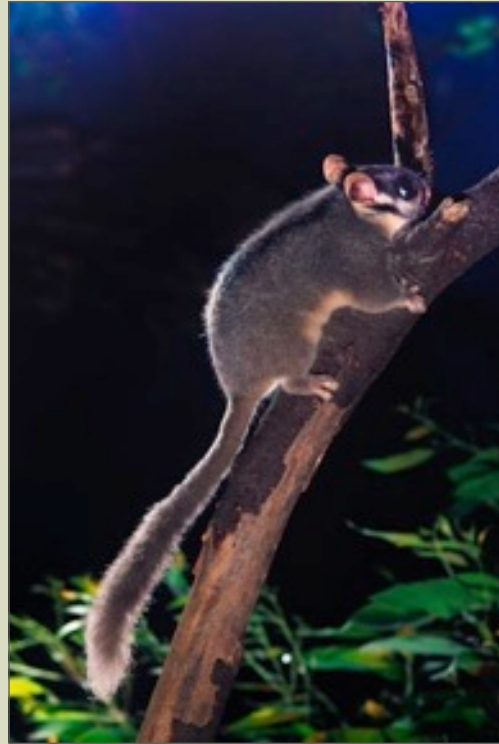
#### VICTORIA'S FAUNAL EMBLEM

Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*) is found only in Victoria. It has always been uncommon and for many years was thought extinct. Much of its habitat in the Central Highlands forests was destroyed in the "Black Saturday" bushfires in 2009.



# Local VIP under threat

## VERY IMPORTANT POSSUM AGAIN THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION



*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*

**Distribution:** Central Highlands of Victoria

**Length:** head-body 15-17 cm, tail 14.5-18 cm.

**Weight:** 120-160g.

**Distinguishing features:** prominent dark, mid-dorsal stripe, club-shaped tail

**Diet:** sap from wattles, insects, honeydew

**Voice:** Distinctive alarm call "ch-ch-chirr", like a scolding bird

**Conservation status:** Listed as "endangered" under the Commonwealth EPBC Act, on the Advisory List of Threatened Vertebrate Fauna in Victoria, and on the IUCN Red List and as "threatened" under the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.



Since its rediscovery in 1961, Leadbeater's Possum has been recorded at more than 300 localities in a restricted area in the Ash forests of the Central Highlands of Victoria. In the 1980s a colony was identified in Mountain Swamp Gum at Yellingbo, in the Yarra Valley. Another population was detected in Snow Gum Woodland at Lake Mountain in 1993.

Small family groups build their nests of shredded bark in tree hollows. They spend most of their time in the nest, sleeping during the day and returning several times each night. Suitable hollows are found only in very large old trees and take many decades to develop. The trees are often dead and already in decay before they contain suitable nest sites. Each group establishes several nests in suitable hollows within its territory, moving periodically between them.

### CONNECTIVITY

In addition to large old eucalypts that provide nest sites, Leadbeater's also need a dense understory, usually of wattles (*Acacia* spp.), in which they feed on sap oozing from cuts, which the possums create and maintain. They also forage for honeydew and insects. Although related to the gliders they have no gliding membrane (the generic name *Gymnobelideus*, means 'naked dart' in reference to this), so they move around the understory by running along and leaping between branches and cannot cross gaps greater than a metre. They therefore rely on the **connectivity** of a dense understory to allow them to move around their territory between feeding and nesting sites.



After the 1939 bushfires in the Central Highlands large numbers of decaying stags (large hollow-bearing trees) among regrowth forest provided suitable habitat allowing the population of Leadbeater's Possum to grow. By the end of the 20th century natural decay and collapse of the old and dead trees meant that suitable nesting sites were being lost at a rate of 4% each year and a population crash was predicted. Clear-fell and salvage logging, which tend to result in regrowth stands of trees all the same age, also lead to loss of, and fragmentation of, habitat. The creation of roads and firebreaks further disrupts connectivity, making it impossible for the possums to move around.

Bushfires have a catastrophic impact on Leadbeater's populations and habitat. The fires in 2009 destroyed 42% of habitat and a number of known groups, including the colonies at Lake Mountain. Nest boxes and feeding stations were established to help the few remaining animals survive but the last three were taken into captivity in 2012. Climate change is likely to produce a hotter, drier climate in which similar devastating fires will be more severe and frequent.

Friends of Leadbeater's Possum is playing an active role in working and advocating to ensure the long-term survival of this very endearing and special animal.

