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## ***The welfare of an unwanted guest in an urban environment: the case of the white-eared opossum (Didelphis albiventris)***

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### **Abstract**

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One major problem facing wildlife is urbanisation, and the increasing contact between human city dwellers and animals. In this study, we investigated the problems of urban opossums (*Didelphis albiventris*), through the analysis involving responses to call-outs ( $n = 500$ ) made by the environmental police of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil (2002 to 2007). Our objective was to characterise the problems faced by opossums and use this information to suggest how their welfare and urban management could be improved. Two types of call-outs were made: (i) solicitation whereby a person called them to report a problem; and (ii) the report of an injured animal. On average, one call-out was made every four days. There were no 'time of year' effects in relation to call-outs, or any effect of gender or age of the person making the call-out. Furthermore, we found no environmental (eg percentage of 'green area') or socio-economic variables (eg salary levels) associated with call-out frequency. The majority of call-outs resulted in the attempt to capture opossums, and usually only one animal was captured. Many of these animals were released into city forest fragments at a mean ( $\pm$  SEM) distance of 8,285 ( $\pm$  727) m; ( $n = 312$ ) from their point of capture. Injured animals were sent to veterinary clinics or to the Government's wildlife processing centre. From these data we were able to make recommendations regarding the welfare and management of urban opossums.

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**Keywords:** animal welfare, human-wildlife conflicts, marsupials, translocations, urban wildlife, white-eared opossums