

Kenneling of Virginia Opossums: *Bossett's Story*

*AT A GLANCE*

- Virginia opossums can easily break and manipulate steel wires, like those used in popular canine kennels, with their teeth.
- Enclosures marketed for domestic species like dogs are not necessarily safe or suitable for opossums.
- If wire kennels are used for this species, the kennels must be double-welded and constructed so that the wire spacing is too narrow to fit an opossum's jaws.

*Background*

When working with injured, ill, or recuperating Virginia opossums, a functional kennel is often a necessity. Wire kennels are collapsible, portable, and relatively inexpensive, making them a popular choice for rehabilitators. While it is an unfortunate truth that equipment designed for native wild species is nearly nonexistent, it is important to note that domestic species like dogs have drastically different biology, behavior, and husbandry requirements than wildlife such as the opossum. Therefore, the use of canine-approved kennels for the housing and transportation needs of opossums is sometimes inadvisable.



*Bossett, as he sought shelter down a city street, before his rescue.*

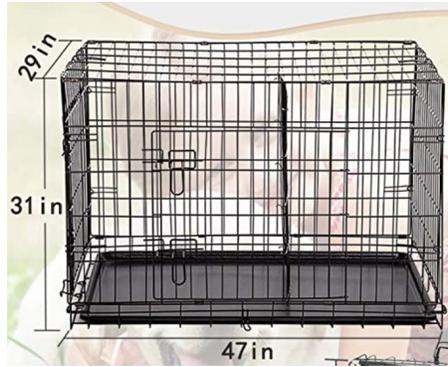
### *Bossett's Story*

The ingenuity of opossums was demonstrated by Bossett, shown on the previous page, whose story gives us a lighthearted yet crucial reminder that these tough creatures are not to be underestimated.

Bossett, a wild male opossum, had found himself in a difficult situation after leaving a riverbank at dawn and walking into the workday bustle of a vibrant nearby city. Exhausted from his journey and the steady heat and glare of the mid-July sun, he sought a resting place down a private street. As he sat pressed against the cool marble of a financial building, he was spotted by local office workers, and he soon drew the concern and curiosity of a small crowd of lunchtime passersby as well. A rehabilitator quickly arrived to help Bossett out of the financial district to safer grounds. His predicament presented a unique opportunity to educate the public about North America's only marsupial. The rehabilitator on scene also got a bit of an education, as the gathering of Bossett into a transport container prompted him to "play 'possum," an unfortunate first for the responding rehabilitator.

Bossett was safely extracted from his urban dilemma and left to recover in a lightly air-conditioned space with plenty of soft blankets, water, and snacks. Despite his fainting spell, he was in great shape at about 7 pounds and looked to be into his second year. Once it was confirmed that he was eating and drinking well and in good overall health, his rehabber determined he would be released the following day after a quick parasite check. He was placed in a brand-new steel wire kennel for the night under infrared camera surveillance and checked on directly at least once in the late evening as a summer squall raged outside.

Bossett's caretaker arrived a second time at his kennel long before sunup to find an opossum-shaped hole in the side. He'd left only a heap of fleece blankets behind, with not a spot of blood or fragment of tooth to be found. Security footage of Bossett's enclosure revealed a calm, healthy opossum trotting away from his kennel and towards the river not long prior. Perhaps the most awe-inspiring part of his story is the fact that Bossett seemed to use the cover of thunder to hide his escape. He'd waited until the storm was loud enough to drown out his movements as he worked the welds at the lower corner of his kennel with his powerful jaws. Careful not to alert his caretaker, the entire operation took Bossett only minutes.



*An example of the kennel from which Bossett escaped*

### *Recommendations*

For the health and safety of rehabilitating Virginia opossums:

- Remember that this species is very strong, crafty, and intelligent. A healthy opossum can easily break and manipulate 1/8<sup>th</sup> inch steel wire.
- Conduct thorough, species-specific research before choosing a kennel/enclosure.
- If it is absolutely necessary to use a wire kennel, it should either be double-welded or with wires spaced too tightly for an opossum to effectively clamp jaws around any portion.
- Regularly monitor the integrity of your kennels and any other space occupied by opossums.
- Remember that dog-approved does not necessarily mean safe for this species.
- When an accepted technique, enclosure, or protocol is proven to be dangerous or ineffective, adapt accordingly.

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