

# ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

JUNE 2023

The opossum (*uh-pass-sm*), the creature whose name most people have trouble pronouncing. Do you include the "o" at the beginning, or do you call this animal "possum"? Different from a rodent, this marsupial, once born, is held inside of a pouch, allowing for more growth and development to happen after birth. Their "milk-teeth" are re-absorbed into their skulls just a few months after birth and all 50 of their adult teeth come through by six months of age. With a similar variety of teeth to humans, the opossum is an omnivore, eating anything from insects to snakes to smaller animals. Even with all these teeth and its sharp bite, the opossum is most known for feigning death (below) when they come across a predator. While 'playing dead' the opossum draws its gums away from its teeth, exposing its full set and readying itself for defense if needed.



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This month's post is a little different from the others. The Collections team is choosing to highlight several vertebral opossum bones (bottom left) that come from different projects and were cataloged at different times. Since most of the material the Tribal Archaeology Section (TAS) collects from the field is highly fragmentary, it's very rare for the Collections team to catalog a complete bone, especially for this small nocturnal animal. Even more rare, is to come across the vertebrae that shape this animal's hairless and rat-like body part: its tail. Used as a fifth limb for climbing (bottom right) and carrying leaves and sticks the tail is made up of an average of 27 caudal vertebrae, ranging in size depending on its location within the tail (top).



Krause and Krause, 2006



Krause and Krause, 2006



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Krause, William and Krause, Winifred. (2006). *The Opossum: Its Amazing Story*. Department of Pathology and Anatomical Sciences School of Medicine. University of Missouri. Columbia, Missouri. [chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmliu/bitstream/handle/10355/15130/OpossumItsAmazingStory.pdf?sequence=1](https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmliu/bitstream/handle/10355/15130/OpossumItsAmazingStory.pdf?sequence=1)

