

Sugar Glider Possums

The Sugar Glider is a small arboreal nocturnal marsupial mammal. It gets its name from the fact that it likes eating the sugary nectar of plants and glides from tree to tree. The sugar glider is very similar in appearance to a flying squirrel but it is in no way related.

The sugar glider has soft thick silver-grey fur on its upper body. The fur on the underside of its body is cream in colour. It is about 200-300mm long, including its tail. The male is larger than the female and weighs about 140 gms. The female weighs about 110gms. The sugar glider has large eyes that give it excellent night vision and allows it to avoid obstacles when gliding at night.

The sugar glider has a very thin skin, called a membrane, attached from each of its wrists to each ankle (like a flying squirrel). It spreads this membrane out and uses it like a paraglider. It adjusts the angle and curvature of the membrane using its limbs to guide it through flight.

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The sugar glider lives in northern, eastern and southern parts of Australia. It is also found on islands to the north of Australia such as New Guinea and part of Indonesia.

In Australia, these animals live in the canopies of forests with Eucalyptus and Acacia trees. Sugar Gliders make their nest out of leaves in a tree hollow. Between six to twelve gliders may share this nest. The availability of tree hollows for nesting is vital in determining the population of sugar gliders in a particular area.

Guided by its excellent eyesight, it forages for food in the night. The sugar glider is an opportunistic omnivore with a varied diet depending on the availability of food. They consume up to 10% of their body weight each day. In summer when insects are plentiful they are primarily insectivores feeding on insects that come their way.

When insects aren't that plentiful they feed on honeydew, pollen, manna and tree sap which they extract by biting the smaller branches of gum trees.

Sugar glider males reach sexual maturity at about 12 months and females between 8-15 months. Breeding usually takes place during winter and spring. Females give birth to two young about 16 days after conception. As with all marsupials these underdeveloped babies crawl from their mother's birth canal into her pouch and attach themselves to a nipple there. The young spend about 70 days in their mother's pouch before being left in the nest for another 50 or so days. The young will then join their mother to forage for food until they are fully independent by the time they reach about 7-10 months.

The major environmental threats to this animal is habitat fragmentation with the clearing of forests. Predators include kookaburras, owls, goannas, snakes, quolls and feral cats.

Humans steal baby sugar gliders and raise them as pets or sell them on the illegal black-market

The Sugar Glider is not a threatened species. They are common throughout their habitat.