

## Everything You Should Know About Possum (or Why Buying Possum is a Good Thing)

**Jamie Possum is a young company and is developing rapidly. Yarns in new colours and weights are planned, and our range of New Zealand and South Sea products is expanding. If you want to keep up with these changes, why not subscribe to our mailing list by clicking on the link below, and entering the word SUBSCRIBE on the subject line. We'll keep you up to date. If you have a question which is not fully answered below, use the same link to contact us. We'll do our best to answer.**

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### **What is possum yarn?**

Possum yarn is a natural fibre derived from the fur of the New Zealand Possum. Every year, the New Zealand government spends around NZ\$50 million culling this animal. Until 1997, the carcasses were incinerated. However, by 1998, new techniques had been developed, and the result was the rich sumptuous fibre which underpins our yarns and our knitwear. Even today, all possum fibre is recovered from culled pelts. No animals are killed simply to produce possum fibre.

### **Why is there an annual cull?**

The New Zealand Possum, despite its name, is not native to New Zealand. It was introduced to the islands by a group of businessmen in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their aim was to farm Australian Brush Tailed Possums for the Empire's fur trade, and they captured and imported around a hundred animals for this purpose. The Australian Brush Tailed Possum has one of the softest furs in the world, and they probably felt assured of success. Unfortunately for them, their tanning skills were poor. The process they used caused the fur to fall out. As a result, their business failed. Their final act was to release the remaining animals into the New Zealand countryside. Now, the country is home to 3.5 million people, 50 million sheep - and 90 million possums. To date, this animal is responsible for 70% of all New Zealand's extinctions, and every single night tucks into eggs, young chicks and around 21,500 tonnes of fresh new shoots and leaves. Ironically, due to the cooler climate, the New Zealand Possum now boasts a fur coat considerably thicker and more luxurious than its Australian ancestor.

### **Why has the Possum been so destructive?**

Before the coming of Europeans, New Zealand had no hunting mammals; no cats, dogs, badgers or foxes. Instead, its forests, islands and mountains were home to what was then the largest variety of birdlife on the planet. Without predators, these birds largely nested on the ground. Early reports suggest that they were so trusting that, if a bird was shot, others would remain standing around in confusion, rather than run away. This was the countryside into which the Possum, sharp of tooth and long of claw, was released. The result was an avian apocalypse.

### **Why aren't Possums simply returned to Australia?**

The New Zealand Possum is an aggressive animal, prone to striking out if disturbed. Wounds from its needle sharp teeth and razor claws invariably require hospital treatment. This risk, taken with the overwhelming number of animals, makes repatriation impossible. There is also evidence that, where Possums have been removed from areas, new populations have moved in to replace them within weeks. Most compelling of all, New Zealand Possums are now more massive and muscular than their Australian cousins. It is likely that reintroduced New Zealand animals would wipe out the native (and endangered) Australian Possum within a short time.

### **What do environmentalists say about Possum fur?**

Both **Fish and Game** (the largest environmental protection agency in the Southern hemisphere) and **WWF NZ** support the cull. Both organisations have, at various times, gone on record to endorse and encourage the development of Possum based products. Possum remains the only fur in the world whose use has received wholehearted support from such organisations. In an ideal world, environmentalists would have preferred that Possums had never been introduced into New Zealand at all. However, they are there, and if what remains of the country's unique and diverse ecosystem is to be saved, it is the Possum that must go.

### **What is so special about Possum fibres?**

The fibres which make up a Possum's fur are hollow, a characteristic which they share with only one other animal; the Polar Bear. Ironically, although both animals have evolved to live at opposite climate extremes, in order to survive, both need to control heat. While the ice bound Polar Bear uses hollow fibres to trap heat, the Brush Tailed Possum uses the same means to dispel the burning heat of Australia's deserts. The fibres are too short to make yarn by themselves, but we make use of their remarkable adaptive ability by blending them with other high quality natural yarns such as merino lambs wool and silk which act as carriers or frameworks. The resulting garment displays all of Possum's best qualities; exquisite softness, a tendency to feel cool in warm weather, to feel warm in cold, and to dry quickly after rain showers.

### **Is it hard to care for garments made from Possum?**

No. With all garments which are soft to the touch, the recommendation is to hand wash or employ the most delicate of machine washes. The merino used as the carrying fibre is not Superwash, and if the washing process is too robust the yarn will felt. However, customers have told us that garments bought in New Zealand as far back as 1998, and in daily use, remain much as they were when first bought. A phrase we've heard more than once is, "These are my best friends. They go everywhere with me". The bottom line is, be nice to possum and it will be nice to you.

**How does Possum Plus knit up?**

The current range is a standard 8 ply; effectively a double knitting weight. It can therefore be used with double knit pattern on 4mm needles (UK8). However, due to the loft (burst) of the yarn it can also be knitted as Aran on 5mm needles (UK6) or even larger. Larger needles give a softer fabric with more drape.

**Can Possum Plus be used for crochet?**

Yes. Treat it as a double knit yarn, and use a 4 mm hook, or as your pattern specifies.

**Will Possum Plus felt?**

Yes. As we have already pointed out, the merino has not been treated (Superwash). Therefore, it will felt well.

**Can I dye Possum Plus?**

Yes. But note that our baseline yarn is not white, and colours will remain muted. If you intend to dye Possum Plus, we suggest that you use Bleached Cream.

**Will Possum Plus be available in other weights?**

Yes. We will be introducing a 4 ply in 2007 for use by both hand and machine knitters, and we plan to follow that with a 10 ply (Aran).

**Will Possum Plus be available in more colours?**

Yes. We have been working with a British based artist to develop a new range of painted yarns, and these will be available very soon. In addition, we aim to considerably expand our current range.

**I am a spinner. Can I buy raw Possum fibre from you?**

A number of customers have asked us this, and we are making enquiries. So watch this space. If we are able to supply raw Possum fibre, be aware that it is quite short and you will need to mix it with a longer staple fibre. We use Merino lamb's wool and silk.

**I am a machine knitter? Will I be able to buy the yarn by the cone?**

We should be in a position to supply our yarn in this form by the latter half of 2007.