Proposal for OPOSSUM emoji
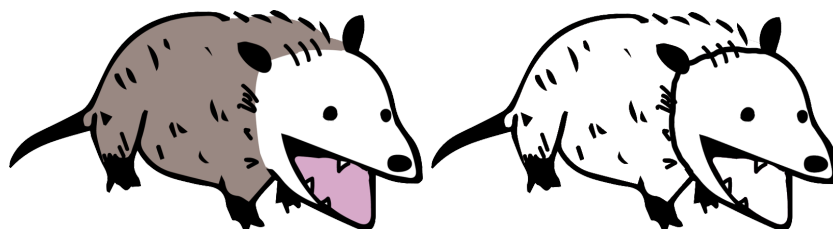
Submitted by: Ryan (R74n / Slweeb)
Date: May 17th, 2021

Credit: Clipart Library

CLDR short name: Opossum
CLDR short keywords: opossum, possum, Virginia opossum,
Proposed sort category: animal-mammal
Proposed location in category: between skunk and kangaroo

Summary: This proposal requests the addition of an opossum emoji to the Unicode Standard. The opossum, also known as the possum in North America, is a common example of urban fauna, and are a staple animal in some parts of the continent. However, the lack of representability in emoji is not ideal. This makes the opossum a powerful candidate for the emoji set.
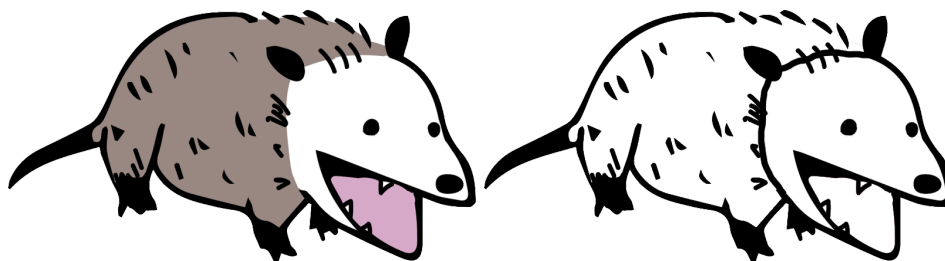
Images

Image 1 (Colored) from Clipart Library: http://clipart-library.com/clipart/opossum-cliparts_6.htm (Free for non-commercial use)
Image 2 (Monochrome) from same source, uncolored by me

Introduction

Opossums, commonly known as simply *possums*, are wild marsupials endemic to North and South America. They offer unique features such as their notable open mouth when hissing, their

tendency to carry their young on their backs, their ability to play dead for hours on end, and the fact that they are the only marsupial in the Americas. When most people think of American urban wildlife, they think of skunks, raccoons, and opossums. Most wild animals of the United States can be represented in some way with the current emoji set, except the opossum and wolverine, however wolverines are not as popular and useful as this friend. The most common and well-known species in North America is the Virginia opossum, which features a furry body, long tail, and a fluffy white head with black ears. There are 108 species of opossum. Like other marsupials, they can also carry young in a pouch located near their belly.

Compatibility

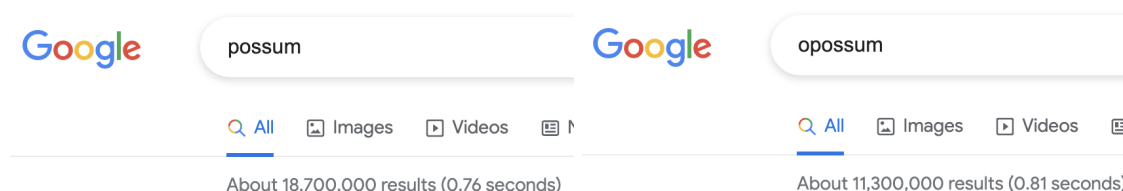The proposed opossum emoji would be a new addition to all platforms.

Frequency

Opossums are incredibly popular animals online and in the real world. There is no doubt the addition of this emoji will cause positive uproar all around the world. In fact, it is already wanted. There is a petition up on Change.org calling on Apple to add an opossum emoji. It has gathered over 16,800 signatures since it was started 2 years ago. To further prove popularity, the Twitter bot account *Possum Every Hour* (@possumeveryhour) has amassed over 341,100 followers in just 3 years. The automated posts, which occur every hour, typically receive hundreds of retweets and thousands of likes.

There are multiple pages for real-life opossums that have gathered hundreds of thousands of fans online. *Sesame the Opossum & Friends* (@itsmesesame) on Instagram has a large fanbase of 205,000. Similarly, *Gilbert The Opossum* (@gilbertopossum) has 153,000 followers. More examples include Poppy (@poppythepossum) at 38,500. Possum Mood (@possum.mood), an artist's profile focused on strictly opossum drawings, has over 75,800 followers.
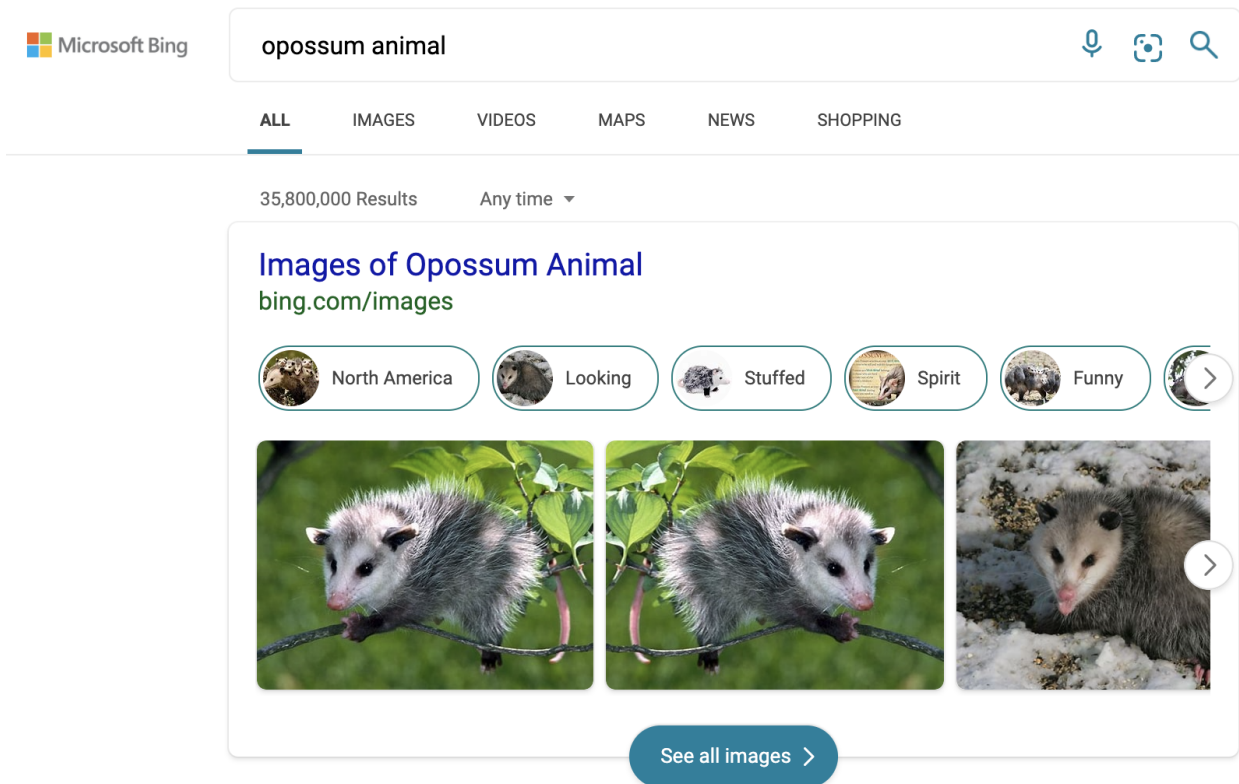
Google Search
Searching *opossum* on Google retrieves 11,300,000 results, while searching for the more common name, *possum*, brings up 18,700,000 results.
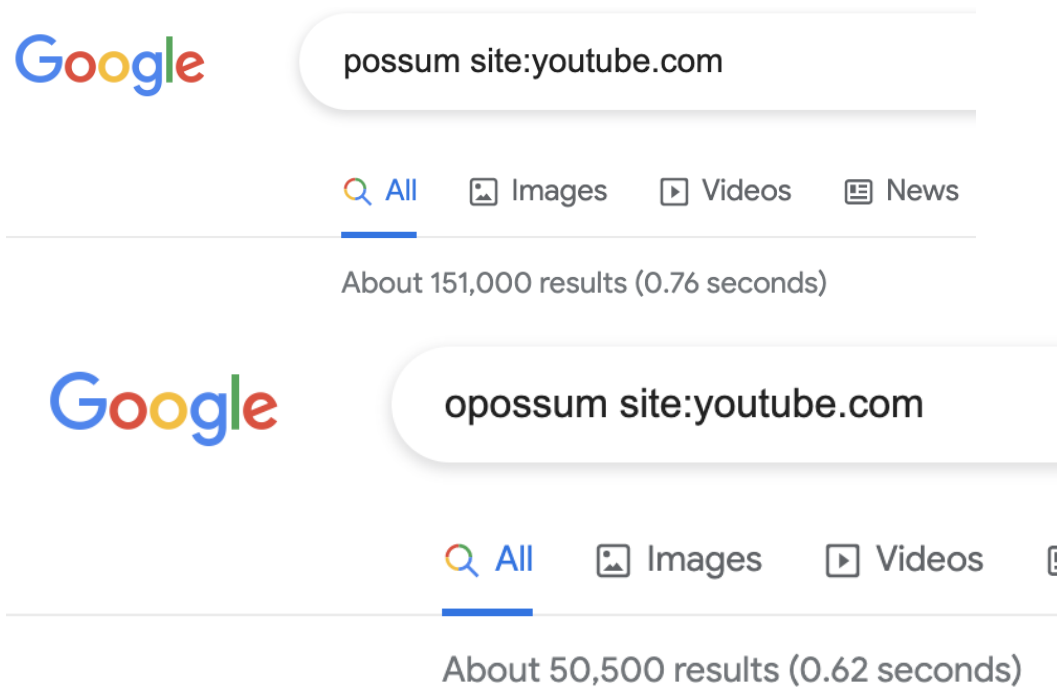

Bing Search
Searching *opossum animal* on Bing shows 35,800,000 results. This is much larger than Google's results. Searching *opossum* alone did not display a search result number.
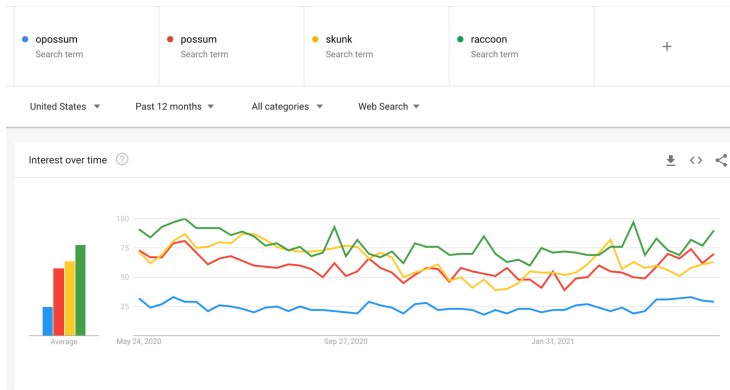
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Google Video Search

Searching Google for YouTube videos of possums yields 151,000 video results. Searching for *opossum* shows 50,500 results.

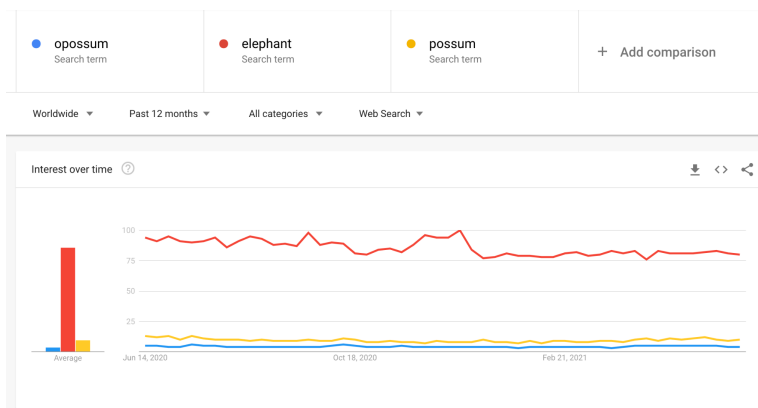
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Google Trends Web Search
Possum, the common term for opossums in the United States, has shown consistent similar interest to skunks and raccoons, which are already representable with emoji.
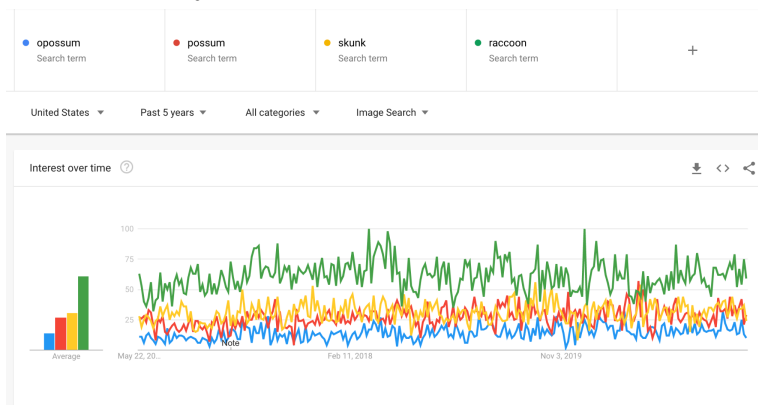

The location is set to the United States to avoid skewed results for the searching of an Australian animal also named *possum*.
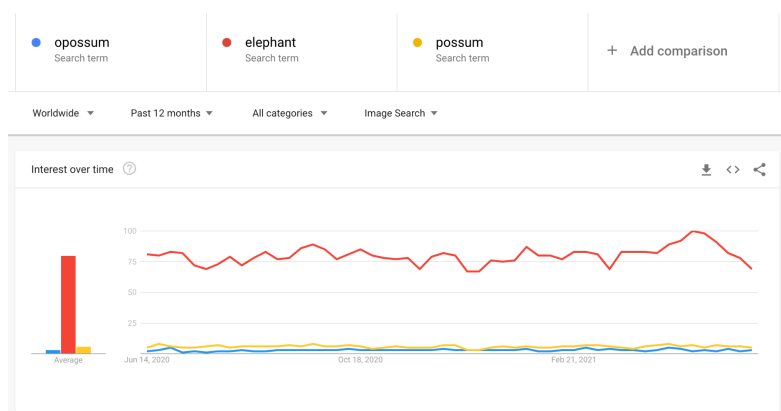

Neither the term *opossum* or *possum* come close to the search frequency of the term *elephant*.

Google Trends Image Search
Possums clearly show as much interest as skunks when it comes to Google Image Search queries, but shy a bit under raccoons.

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Similarly to the web search frequency, *elephant* clearly outweighs *opossum* and *possum*.

Multiple Uses

The opossum emoji would have many uses. The distinct open-mouth expression of the opossum can be used to indicate screaming or hissing, as seen in the famous meme "He Scream At Own Ass", (https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/he-scream-at-own-ass) where opossums are shown in their natural defensive expression, pointing towards their back end. This Tweet, for example, has 35,800 likes: https://twitter.com/RagenEggert/status/861071099144097793. The yelling can be accompanied by multiple letter A's to form a common way of shouting online, "AAAAAAAAAAA". There are currently limited ways to indicate shouting through emoji.

Another use would be to accompany the phrase *playing possum* or sometimes simple *possuming*, which refers to the opossum's ability to play dead for up to 4 hours at a time. Humans don't play dead often, but they do pretend to sleep, which is what the phrase is commonly used for.

If vendors decide to include babies on the animal's back to reinforce the opossum concept, it can be used for taking care of children or babysitting. If feeling creative, the opossum emoji can be used for saying one is able to do something, a play on the word *possum* in Latin, meaning *I am able to* or *I can*.

For a more grim example, opossums are very common roadkill in the United States, so a usage could be "Just saw a poor baby on the side of the road… [OPOSSUM] 😭"

According to Native-Languages.org, opossums are symbols of fertility in some Mexican tribes. They are also seen as clan animals in Native American cultures.

Image Distinctiveness

Opossums are easily distinguishable from other animals and animal emoji. Features such as their pointy face and long tail give them this distinct look. Baby opossums on the back and a hissing expression would strengthen this.

Completeness

This emoji would complete the set of common American urban wildlife next to SKUNK, RACCOON, and BIRD, which looks much like a pigeon on Apple's emoji set.

Frequently Requested

A Change.org petition was put up calling on Apple to add an opossum emoji, and has amassed over 16,800 signatures since it was started 2 years ago. People clearly want an opossum emoji.

Selection Factors for Exclusion

Overly Specific

An opossum emoji is not overly specific, it represents 108 different species of opossums.

Open-ended

There are no other ways to represent the opossum currently.

Already Representable

The opossum is not representable in the Unicode Standard. There are currently only two marsupial emoji: KANGAROO and KOALA. Meanwhile, there are six emoji for rodents. Being the only marsupial living in the Americas, it is an important animal to include.

Logos, Brands, Etcetera

Opossums are a species millions of years old, and are not a creation of humans and therefore cannot be copyrighted or trademarked. They could be used in place of existing logos that may include an opossum, but mostly represent the animal and its features.

Transient

Opossums do not seem to be going anywhere, and people don't seem to be losing interest as shown by the Google Trends data.

Faulty Comparison

The only comparisons that can be made are justifiable, being the other urban wildlife animals.

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Exact Image

Vendors may choose to draw the opossum however they'd see fit. The proposal does have recommendations like including an open mouth and potentially baby opossums atop the back, though.

Author Information

Ryan, also known as R74n or Slweeb ([R74n.com](R74n.com) & @slweeb), is an emoji expert and connoisseur, fascinated by not just the images but the technicality behind it all, and Unicode in general. He is the founder of the Copy Paste Dump, a website with various collections of emoji, Unicode characters, text faces, ASCII art, and more.