



IS IT BROWSERS?

Trees can lose leaves when they are eaten by herbivores, including insects and marsupials. Both possums and koalas can sometimes defoliate trees, partially or entirely, sometimes leading to tree death. If marsupial browsing is causing a loss of leaves, you may spot animals in the tree canopy (possums by night, koalas at any time), you will probably observe faecal pellets on the ground beneath the canopy and if extreme defoliation has occurred, leaves may only remain on the tips of small pendulous branches. Possums will sometimes leave the midrib and petiole of larger, tougher leaves. Possum browsing can become more concentrated on eucalypts during drought as other food sources become unavailable, and can strongly exacerbate the effects of drought. Browsing is often concentrated on preferred species and individual trees.

On some occasions, overbrowsing can be so severe as to cause widespread tree death. Sadly, the resulting loss of habitat can cause widespread suffering for the animals as they slowly starve. One recent example of over-browsing by koalas occurred in Cape Otway in Victoria.

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