

# Rumford man summonsed in opossum case

SJ [sunjournal.com/2019/07/17/rumford-man-summonsed-in-opossum-case](http://sunjournal.com/2019/07/17/rumford-man-summonsed-in-opossum-case)

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RUMFORD — A Rumford man has been summonsed for animal cruelty, a civil violation, after authorities said he cut off the tail of an opossum and left the animal for dead.

Erik Matthews, 32, faces up to a \$2,500 fine and could be required to pay for the care, housing and medical treatment of the injured opossum that is living at Misfits Rehab in Auburn. Matthews could also be prohibited from owning any animals.

Civil violations carry no jail time, but they have a lower burden of proof than criminal charges, which means they are easier for prosecutors to prove.

Matthews is scheduled to appear in court Sept. 3.

Matthews is accused of cutting off the tail off the opossum last month. The opossum had roamed the Rumford neighborhood for a couple of years and was popular among some residents. One family named him Percy.

The Maine Warden Service investigated Matthews, who lives in the neighborhood, and forwarded its report to the Oxford County District Attorney's Office for possible charges.

The Warden Service said Matthews told a warden that the opossum attacked him. Those who know Percy doubt Matthews' story and say the opossum is docile and has never been aggressive to people in the neighborhood, even when he was scared or in pain.

Matthews could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Terri Dunham, who helped capture the opossum and brought him to Misfits Rehab, said she was "overwhelmed with joy" to learn Matthews had been summonsed.

"I'm just very happy that something's going to be done," Dunham said.

In the wild, opossums need their tails to help stabilize them as they climb trees, keep their balance along branches and gather food. Because he no longer has a tail, Percy can never be returned to the wild.



Percy after his tail was cut off in Rumford last month. *Mifits Rehab photo*

Percy is expected to remain at Misfits Rehab for the rest of his life.

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Terri Dunham found Percy the opossum hiding in her Rumford neighborhood days after his tail was cut off. *Terri Dunham photo*