

Killer at large

Possum poisoner faces up to \$18,000 in fines

Animal welfare | Jessica Bennett

A SPATE of possum poisonings — with 11 found dead in the one street — is being investigated in Cheltenham.

Michele Phillips, who runs the South Oakleigh Wildlife Shelter, said 11 possums had been found poisoned in Bernard St, Cheltenham North, in the past two weeks.

"We know instantly they've been baited because of the way they die," Ms Phillips said.

"It takes up to three days to kill them and they bleed from their eyes — it's horrific for them.

"Whoever is doing this needs to understand that rat bait will kill anything, possums, dogs, cats or humans — they are endangering everyone."

A Department of Sustainability and Environment spokeswoman confirmed the deaths were being investigated.

"Brushtail and ringtail possums are protected wildlife," she said.

"It is an offence to kill or harm a possum, with the maximum penalty \$6100 — using poisons to kill a possum attracts an additional fine of \$12,200."

Ms Phillips said rescuers had been called to Bernard St a number of times to retrieve baby possums whose mothers had been killed.

"We work closely with the Southern Animal Emergency

Centre (in Highett), and they had noticed it was happening a lot more than usual as well," she said.

"So we started recording where it's happening and realised it's all in Bernard St."

Ms Phillips said her shelter was now overrun caring for rescued baby possums.

"There are more possums around now because it's coming into spring, but for those who don't want them getting into their roofs, there are better ways to get rid of them," she said.

"If you put up a possum box in the tree, they will stay there, or if you put mothballs or a bright light in your roof, they will leave."

Ms Phillips said the shelter urgently needed more possum boxes made.

Anyone who can help can email michele@sows.org.au

