

~ LIVING WITH WILDLIFE ~

SKUNKS



NATURAL HISTORY

Striped Skunks are members of the Mustelid family, the same as weasels and badgers. These bushy-tailed creatures are always black and white and absolutely unmistakable. Striped Skunks typically weigh 3-5 kg and measure 50-75 cm long. All skunks have small heads and eyes, pointed snouts, and short legs that make them appear to waddle. Their strong forefeet and long nails are useful for digging. They tend to be slow moving animals, never in a hurry, and are generally poor climbers. A litter usually ranges from 1 to 7 and the young are born from late April to early June. Skunks prefer semi-open country and are scarcely found more than 4 km from a water source. Where urbanization has occurred, skunks have adapted to denning beneath buildings, decks and woodpiles. Skunks are generally nocturnal and begin foraging at sunset. Skunks are omnivorous and help keep rodent and insect populations in check. An estimated 70% of a skunk's diet consists of insects considered harmful to humans.

The chemical skunks spray is a sulphur compound called N-bulymercaptan. It is ejected in a fanlike pattern from two small openings near the animal's rectum. Skunks seldom spray without warning or cause. Skunks spray in defense against attack or to protect their young. They may also spray if surprised. They only have 30 ml of spray and it takes them more than a week to re-supply. Their spray is most accurate and effective at a range of up to 6 m. Although they have sharp teeth, they rarely use them in defense.

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SITUATIONS AND SOLUTIONS

SKUNKS AROUND THE HOME: The best solution is to limit resources available to the skunks. Control garbage cans and eliminate pet foods as food sources.

SKUNKS LIVING UNDER THE HOUSE: Skunks choose these spots because they are sheltered and generally good areas to burrow. A persistent, faint skunk odour around the hole may indicate there is a skunk living inside. To find out sprinkle the entrance area with flour. If the skunk is in residence, it will leave footprints in the flour during the night. Once you know the family is gone for the night, close openings in buildings with boards or wire mesh that extends at least 20-25 cm underground. Live traps can be used to catch and relocate the skunk. DO NOT trap during April-June when babies may be in the den. If the mother cannot return, the babies will starve. This is inhumane and can cause odour problems.

HUMAN OR PETS SPRAYED: If sprayed, use the following recipe:

4 cups 3% hydrogen peroxide
¼ cup baking soda
1 tsp. liquid dish soap

CONCERN ABOUT RABIES AND OTHER DISEASES: In some parts of North America, rabies in the skunk population is a serious problem; however, in Alberta there is a much lower incidence. Typical behaviours of a rabies infected skunk are walking in circles, falling and being overly friendly or lethargic. These symptoms may also be signs of severe concussion in the animal. If you suspect the skunk has rabies, stay far away from the skunk. Keep children and pets indoors. Call your local wildlife hospital. If possible, have someone stay in visual contact with the animal until help arrives. If a

person or pet is bitten, report the incident to your local health department and contact a physician or veterinarian immediately.



Medicine River
WILDLIFE CENTRE

Box 115 Spruce View AB T0M 1V0 (403)728-3467 www.mrwc.ca

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