



SKUNKS

HABIT AND HABITAT

Skunks are a member of the weasel family. Skunks are born from late April to early May litters vary in size from one to seven, the average is five. Skunks are hardly ever found more than two miles from a water source. In urban territories, skunks den beneath buildings, decks, dumps, and woodpiles. They are capable of burrowing a den a foot or so underground, with well-hidden entrances. They like warm, dry, dark, and defensible areas; most house basements and crawl spaces qualify. Skunks are generally nocturnal and begin foraging at sunset. Skunks eat both vegetable and meat. They often travel five to ten miles within their territory at night looking for field mice and other small rodents as well as birds, eggs, garbage, acorns and fallen fruit.. They also dig for insects, especially beetles, larvae, and earthworms. Since skunks will eat just about anything, they help keep roadways and neighborhoods clean. An estimated 70 percent of a skunk's diet consists of insects considered harmful to humans.

Defensive/Noxious Odor

If approached by an intruder and unable to flee, a skunk will usually fluff its fur, shake its tail, stamp the ground with its front feet, growl, stand on its hind legs, turn its head and spit to scare the potential attacker. If those techniques do not work, it will lift up its tail and spray. The chemical skunks spray at their enemies is a sulfur compound called N-bulymercaptan. The glands that produce the chemical hold enough for five or six full-powered sprays. Although they have sharp teeth, they rarely use them in defense, because their spray is most accurate and effective at a range of up to 15 feet.

Urban living

Having adapted well to neighborhoods, it's not uncommon to find skunks and domestic cats dining peacefully together. There have been cases of skunks entering homes through pet doors, dining with the family cat and finding a quiet closet or empty bed to spend the night. As long as the skunk does not feel threatened, it won't spray.

With their slow, waddling and bushy tail, these gentle mammals are delightful to see from a distance, and play an important role in keeping nature in balance- the natural way. Skunks are very adaptable and often find food and nesting sites around human habitations. The best protection against them is to modify your habitat to limit resources available to them.

Tips

- DO NOT FEED the skunks. They can easily become dependent on human food sources.
- Never leave pet food outside.
- Never discard edible garbage where skunks can get to it.
- Secure garbage containers and eliminate their odors. Use a small amount of ammonia or cayenne pepper in the garbage to discourage scavenging.
- Start a nontoxic insect-control program (especially for grubs) to discourage digging.
- A persistent, faint skunk odor around a hole leading under a foundation or deck indicates a skunk may be present. To find out, cover the hole with loose dirt; if a skunk is in residence, it will dig out during the night. Allow three days for this test; if dirt remains undisturbed, then close the opening with masonry, boards, or hardware cloth.
- Install one-way doors on entrances to skunk dens, allowing the skunk to leave at night but barring it from entering. Watch for any new holes. Do not use one-way doors during May through August, when babies may be in the den. If the mother cannot return, the babies will starve. This is inhumane and can also cause odor problems.