

SKUNKS

Skunks are docile, non-aggressive, near-sighted creatures, very sensitive to light, and with a keen sense of smell and hearing. They are good diggers and poor climbers. They are usually (but not always) active at night and asleep during the day. If you have open access to warm dry spaces under your house, deck, or garage, mother skunk may find it and give birth to 4-6 young in April - June. The wandering territory of skunks is about 1.5 miles. They eat insects, lawn grubs, berries, nuts, and small rodents, and they love pet food. If you feed your pet outside and there is leftover food, it will attract skunks, raccoons, and opossums. Always feed pets indoors.

Skunks are attracted by mice, rats, lizards, frogs, garbage, acorns, beetles, larvae, earthworms, grubs, and fallen fruits. Skunks' appetite for baby mice and rats helps to control these rodents naturally. A large and preferred part of a skunk's diet consists of insects.

Skunks' only defense is a noxious-smelling acid fired from their anal glands. They will raise their tail and stamp their front feet in warning before directing a forceful stream or spray at a perceived predator when they feel they are unable to flee.

Always keep your dog on a leash at night, even in your backyard. Turn on the light and make noise and turn on the lights. Make sure that entrances to spaces under buildings, decks, and porches are closed off to skunks.

Resist the urge to trap and remove a skunk. During birthing season, starving babies may be left behind. The best policy is to be patient; avoid agitating a skunk; and encourage her to leave on her own. Skunks are beneficial creatures who move slowly and have poor eyesight. They will readily leave when you remove attractants.

Skunk Situations

Mother skunk is denning under one of your buildings:

In the San Francisco Bay Area skunks mate from January to March, and baby skunks live with their mother until late fall. If you suspect that a mother skunk and babies have a den under one of your buildings, leave them alone for their first few weeks. Once you start to see them leave their den each evening as a family keep a bright light on, and play a radio in the den area, thus encouraging mama skunk to find another place. **DO NOT TRAP THE MOTHER SKUNK OR CLOSE OFF A DEN AREA CONTAINING BABIES** or the babies will starve and die. Trapping a mother skunk or any skunk is not only very inhumane. When a mother skunk is trapped and her babies are left, a foul odor will also result when the babies die.

Once the babies are old enough (about 2 months of age) to go on night outings with their mother, you can make the area unpleasant with lights and radio noise. Whether dealing with a single skunk or a skunk family, in most cases, it is best to remove attractants, use deterrents, and wait until the skunks leave on their own. Then you can create a barrier to prevent re-entry.

To be sure that the skunk family is out before you seal the opening, sprinkle flour around the opening to the den. You will see tracks in the flour if the animal is still using the den. Close the opening only when no new tracks are seen for at least 48 hours.

How to make a one-way door when skunks are not raising babies:

One-way doors on entrances to skunk dens can be effective, allowing the skunk to leave at night but preventing it from re-entering. Leave the door in place for 3 nights to make sure the skunk has left (sprinkle flour outside entrance to record skunk footprints). Do NOT use one-way doors during April, May or June, when babies may be in the den.

Construct a one-way door by making a wooden frame the size of the opening with rigid wire stakes to hold the door in place and a double layer of ½" hardware cloth slightly larger than the opening "hinged" at the top so that it won't swing inward. When you are sure that the skunk has left, you can permanently close the opening.

A skunk is digging in your lawn or garden:

Skunks found in gardens are usually searching for beetles, grubs, and other insect pests. If your lawn has grubs you may be over-watering it. You can purchase grub-eating nematodes at a garden supply store to control the grubs in the lawn. Skunk repellents that can be sprayed on lawns may contain cayenne pepper or a homemade mix of 1 cup castor oil and 1 cup liquid dish soap, blended with a gallon of water. Pick up fallen fruit in your garden. Leave floodlights on at night in areas where you want to discourage skunks.

Try sinking jars filled with ammonia into the ground, with sponges as wicks. Anchor the jars in the soil to prevent spilling. Hanging socks filled with mothballs may also deter them (and also raccoons).

A motion-sensitive light or a motion-sensitive sprinkler such as the “ScareCrow,” when activated *at night only*, will discourage skunks from specific areas. Keep in mind that the “ScareCrow” will also squirt water on other wildlife and pets that pass by.

A skunk is trapped in a hole or window well:

Carefully lean a rough board that extends at a 45° angle or less from the bottom of the well to ground level so that it serves as a ramp for the skunk to climb out during the night. Try not to let the skunk see you and become agitated when you install the board. Always cover holes and window wells. Other animals and children can fall into window wells, too.

Protect chickens from skunks and other predators.

It is important to prevent skunks from accessing chicken houses and chicken yards as they search for eggs and young chickens.

Chickens and other small animals such as domestic ducks and rabbits are extremely vulnerable to predators. They depend on us to

keep them safe. Building a predator-proof chicken house and chicken yard can prevent attacks on chickens that can traumatize your family and cause great suffering to your chickens. Find a detailed description of predator-proof housing for chickens at the following link:

<http://creativecrittersolutions.org/safeChickens.php>

Skunks are entering your house through a pet door:

Cat doors pose a continual problem because skunks (and other wildlife) can smell the cat food inside. Using a screen or boards gently funnel the skunks back outside the way they came in. Better yet, eliminate cat doors and train your cats to be indoor cats, thus increasing their chances for a much longer life (14-15 years average for indoor cats; 2-5 years average for cats allowed outdoors). If you must have a cat door, keep your cat inside and lock the door at night.

You find a skunk in your pool:

Skunks sometimes fall into pools because of their poor eyesight. Put a pool skimmer or broom under the skunk, lift her out, and allow her time to recover. If she is still alive but limp after 2 hours contact the closest wildlife rehabilitation center for advice. (See links below.)

You see baby skunks alone and their mother is either absent or found dead:

Carefully place an upside-down laundry basket over the young skunks and contact the closest wildlife rehabilitation center. (See links below.)

A skunk has sprayed your dog:

Always turn on a light in the yard at night, scan the yard visually, and keep your dog on a leash when taking a dog out for a bathroom break. Apply a commercial skunk deodorizer from a veterinarian if your dog has been sprayed. Wear waterproof gloves, and keep the mixture away from the dog's eyes, mouth, and nose. Wear a mask

and protect your own eyes when you are neutralizing skunk spray. The odor of skunk spray will eventually dissipate.

Normally, skunks are nocturnal, although newly weaned, young skunks may sometimes be seen in daylight hours. If you see a mature skunk that ambles about during daylight hours and behaves strangely (walking in circles, falling, acting overly friendly or lethargic) it may have contracted rabies. Immediately contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center for advice. Keep people and pets away from the skunk. Make sure your pets' rabies vaccinations are up to date.

You can avoid skunk problems by focusing on preventive measures that make your home and yard wild animal-proof (closing openings, picking up fallen fruit, etc.) using the guidelines on the main page of this web site. <http://creativecrittersolutions.org/index.php>

If you find an injured skunk, contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center. Contact the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA) for a list of wildlife rehabilitation centers in the United States and some other countries: (320) 230-9920
https://www.nrawildlife.org/page/Found_Injured_Wildlife

For immediate advice regarding a wild animal in distress contact WildCare (<https://discoverwildcare.org>), a wildlife rehabilitation center in California: 415-456-7283

Information courtesy of *www.creativecrittersolutions.org*