

Skunk Facts:

- Skunks have adapted well to rural and residential life. While skunk families can be fun to watch, they can also cause problems and frustration for property owners and residents.
- Skunks are burrowing animals found in almost all parts of Ontario.
- Skunks are omnivorous; feeding on grubs, insects, small rodents, carrion, fruits and vegetables.
- In Ontario, skunks breed from February to March; gestation is eight weeks and produce from four to seven young which are usually independent by mid-summer.
- Skunks are active all year but may be dormant during periods of extended cold.
- They are attracted to spaces under porches, sheds, woodpiles, rocks or debris, garbage, pet food and open composts.
- Removing a skunk without repairing or attending to the attractants creates an opportunity for other skunks to move in.

Problems and best solutions:

Lawn & garden:

Skunks are usually attracted to lawns and gardens, especially after a rainfall when grubs and larvae are near the surface. Skunks dig small round holes, and in some cases, roll up large chunks of sod. The grubs feed on the grass root system, destroying the grass.

Garbage / composters:

Garbage compost and pet food can provide a real feast for skunks. Once skunks find a food source, they will continue to return. Since skunks are poor climbers, close down this wildlife café by:

- Storing garbage in bins or boxes
- Storing garbage inside the garage or basement until the morning of pick up
- Using a repellent like oil of mustard or mothballs in the bottom of the garbage can
- Fitting garbage cans with tight lids and secure the cans so they cannot be tipped over
- Using enclosed-style composters
- Feeding pets indoors.

Evicting skunks from homes, sheds, porches:

Skunks are burrowing animals, so spaces under porches, sheds, woodpiles, rocks or debris are an open invitation for skunks to set up house. Preventing these animals from moving in should be your priority. The following suggestions will assist you in removing skunks and will discourage them from re-entering.

*NOTE: Evictions should only be done when babies can move on their own.

Step 1:

If you think you know where the entrance to the den is, check to see if it is in use. Cover the hole with dirt or balled up newspaper. If the hole is in use, the skunks will burrow through the dirt or paper. If the dirt or paper is undisturbed for three to five days, the hole can be closed permanently.

Step 2:

Encourage skunks to leave on their own by making the home uninhabitable. Try these methods:

- Sprinkle Naphtha Flakes around the area (babies must be mobile) or distribute urine-soaked kitty litter in and around the den.
- Keep the area brightly lit.
- Play a radio at the entrance using an all-talk radio station.
- Repeatedly block the entrance with dirt or newspaper to create an obstacle to entry.

- Install a one-way door, allowing the skunk to leave, but not re-enter. This method should not be used between April and September when skunks are rearing their young, unless the babies are mobile.

Step 3:

Before permanently blocking any entrance:

- Check to see if skunks have moved out, especially between April and September, when babies may be present.
- Be sure that no animal is trapped inside the den, as it will starve to death. Not only will the animal suffer, but you will be left with a decomposing carcass.

Step 4:

When you are sure all skunks have left:

- Secure the hole to prevent re-entry. Make sure all boards or galvanized heavy wire screening is extended at least 20 to 30 cm. straight down and 20 to 30 cm. angled 90 degrees outwards underground. Skunks are excellent diggers and continuing the barrier at a 90 deg. angle makes it more difficult to dig under.
- Backfill the area with dirt.
- Repair siding and holes in buildings.
- Place wood or wire screening around base of porches and buildings as a prevention skirt. Make sure you cover these areas to at least 20 to 30 cm. straight down and 20 to 30 cm. angled 90 deg. outwards.
- Eliminate piles of rocks or debris and stack woodpiles neatly to eliminate holes.

Window wells/ tree/wells:

Skunks can become trapped in window wells. Since they are poor climbers, you can help them out by placing a rough board or board with cleats in the well. Try to keep the angle at less than 45 degrees so that it is not too steep.

To put the board in the well, approach slowly and keep low out of sight. Retreat if the skunk stamps its front feet or raises its tail and approach again later. Keep all pets and people away and the skunk will leave on its own – usually after dark. Either leave the ramp in place permanently or place a tight-cover over the wells to prevent this from happening again.

After they spray:

A skunk can spray up to 10 feet with great accuracy from the two ducts located under its tail. Skunks are placid creatures and will only spray when they feel threatened. It provides advance warning by stamping its front feet, raising its tail and turning its rear end toward the threat.

To remove skunk spray from.....

Eyes: *Flush with large quantities of clean water. The painful irritation that occurs when the spray gets into the eyes will soon pass. Consult your doctor as soon as possible.*

Pets: *Consult your veterinarian as soon as possible.*

Non-Living Objects:

Use diluted chlorine bleach, ammonia or vinegar. Do a test spot to make sure these do not damage the material.

Skin: *Wash with carbolic soap.*

Trapping, hunting, and poisoning:

If you live-capture a nuisance animal, and do not kill it humanely, you must, within 24 hours, either release it in close proximity to where you caught it, as directed by the Ministry of Natural Resources

Using body gripping traps or placing poison could result in criminal charges and/or provincial fines up to \$5000.

Rabies:

Although all warm-blooded mammals can carry the rabies virus, skunks are a major vector of the virus in Ontario. To avoid human exposure to rabies:

- All owned dogs and cats living in rural and urban areas of the Township of Wilmot are required by law to be vaccinated against rabies. Consult your veterinarian for more information.
- Stay away from all wild animals especially if they appear tame, injured or sick.
- Skunks exhibiting sick or abnormal behavior should be reported to Bylaw Enforcement/Animal Control Services at 519-634-8444 or Waterloo Regional Police at 519-570-3000.
- If bitten by any animal, wash the wound with soap and water. Contact a doctor, and report the bite to Waterloo Regional Health Unit at 519 883-2008 and Animal Control Services at 519-634-8444.
- If possible, have someone keep the animal in sight so that it can be captured or confined until the arrival of the officer.

In Summary:

Many wild animals, including skunks, have adapted well to life inside and outside residential and industrial parameters. Because food and shelter are plentiful and natural predators are limited, these animals will continue to live near us. If we learn to share the environment with wildlife and reduce problems by getting rid of sources of food and shelter on our properties, these visitors can entertain us as they make their way to a more suitable home.