



## **SKUNKS** living with wildlife

*In an effort to coexist with wildlife, consider the enormous hardships these intelligent and fascinating wild species encounter because so much of their habitat has been destroyed. Each year they are forced into closer contact with humans and must compete with us for food, shelter and space. With a little understanding, patience and a few precautions and common sense steps, we can all enjoy the wonderfully interesting wild animals who share our backyards and cities.*

Skunks are shy animals, known for their offensive odour and distinctive black and white markings. They are nocturnal animals but may occasionally be active during the day.

**Habitat.** Skunks can be found in their natural habitats of forest borders, brushy areas, and grassy fields. Skunks are burrowing animals. In urban areas, they are often found under buildings, porches and in culverts.

**Diet.** Skunks, like raccoons, are omnivores. Their diet consists mainly of insects, but also includes mice and other small mammals, eggs, fruits, nuts, vegetation, carrion, and garbage. This varied diet is one of the reasons that skunks have adapted so well to living in close proximity to humans.

**Reproduction.** Skunks breed in late winter to early spring and usually give birth in May or June. They have between three-to-10 young per litter and the young remain in the den for six-to-eight weeks before venturing out with their mother.

### **Common questions:**

#### **How can I get rid of a skunk that has taken up residence under my porch/shed?**

If this problem has arisen in the months of May to July the skunk is most likely a mother with young. In this case we encourage the homeowner to be tolerant and patient. Young do not leave the den until they are six-to-eight weeks of age. No exclusion methods should be put in place until the homeowner notices the young leaving the den. Homeowners should also not attempt exclusion in the winter months because it is a difficult time of year for the skunk to find an alternate den site and food sources. If the skunk is unable to find food and shelter, then the winter weather will result in a cruel demise. The best time to exclude skunks is late summer or early

fall. The most effective steps involve using deterrent methods to encourage the skunk to move and then preventing future access.

When dealing with skunks, noise and light are highly effective deterrent measures. Female skunks select den sites that are quiet and dark because they offer her a sense of security for her young. Therefore introducing noise and light to the site will encourage her to seek an alternate den site. Place a battery-powered radio tuned to an all-talk station near the den. You can also place a battery-powered light shining towards the den, and go out several times a day and make noise. These methods will disturb the skunk and make her feel less secure and more likely to move out.

The most effective exclusion technique is the installation of an L-shaped galvanized screen around the perimeter of the porch or shed but leaving the entrance/exit hole open. To do this dig a one inch deep by one inch wide trench around the perimeter and place the screen in the trench to form a backwards 'L'. The base of the 'L' should be at least eight inches wide. Fit the screen tightly against the building then fill the trench in with dirt.

To determine if the skunk is still using the den, place a ball of newspaper in the entrance/exit or cover the hole loosely with dirt. If the newspaper or dirt is moved then the skunk is still residing in the den and the deterrent techniques above should be continued. If the dirt or newspaper is not disturbed for several days you can take steps described above to permanently seal the entrance. **IF YOU SEE A SKUNK PACING AND DIGGING FRANTICALLY TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE DEN, ASSUME THERE ARE YOUNG INSIDE AND IMMEDIATELY UNSEAL THE ENTRANCE HOLE.**

### **I have a skunk trapped in my window well. What should I do?**

Slowly and carefully lower a rough board into the window well, at a gentle slope to serve as a ramp. The skunk can use this to climb out of the well. Keep people and pets away from the area and the skunk will use the ramp to escape. To prevent this situation from arising again the homeowner should place a tight-fitting cover over all window wells around the house or set up ramps in each window well so skunks can escape. If the skunk appears to have injured itself, do not assist the skunk in escaping until you have contacted your local Ontario SPCA Branch, affiliated Humane Society or a licensed wildlife rehabilitator to determine whether rehabilitation is required.

### **My dog/I got sprayed by a skunk. Do you have any suggestions to get rid of the stench?**

Skunks employ warning signs before they spray, such as stamping their front feet, fluffing their fur, and raising their tail. However, if you are unable to avoid being sprayed by a skunk, there are several solutions that can be used to help the smell fade; however, only time can permanently eliminate the odour. Here are some suggestions:

- Diluted vinegar solution
- Tomato juice
- Carbolic soap (safe to use on skin and clothes)
- Toothpaste
- Commercial products (shampoos for animals can be purchased at vet clinics)

If you or your dog got sprayed in the eyes - immediately flush with cool water. Skunk spray in the eyes is painful and irritating, but it will not cause blindness. If irritation does not subside, seek medical advice.