

Skunk Identification and Control Q&A

What do skunks look like?

The skunks which reside in Stettler are the striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*). It is the most common in the area out of the four skunk species found in North America. Easily recognizable by a black body with a narrow white stripe on the forehead and wider stripes that extend from the neck along each side of the back.

When time of day will skunks be out and about?

Skunks are nocturnal dwellers who are active during the evening and night time hours. They do not rush in their wanderings and take their time searching for food and a den.

What do skunks eat?

A skunks diet in the wild consists of insects, rodents, eggs, young waterfowl, and other ground or nesting birds. In an urban setting such as Stettler a skunk has a large buffet of garbage or other waste which mankind produces to feed on. This is one of the main reasons why skunks tend to be situated around villages, towns and cities.

Do skunks carry rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease which affects the nervous system of warm-blooded animals. This disease has been present in the skunk population since the late 1970's however the instance of rabies in Alberta is minimal. Symptoms a skunk will portray if infected by rabies may be:

- Being active during day time hours
- Walking in circles
- Falling over or lethargic demeanour

Should a skunk be observed with these behaviours or if a skunk is suspected to be infected with rabies stay indoors with all children and pets and contact the nearest Agriculture Agri-Food Canada veterinarian.

What do skunks spray and why?

Skunks possess scent glands near the anus or rear of its body. The gland contains approximately 15cc (about 3 teaspoons) of the liquid which is of a yellow colour and oily texture. A skunk will discharge or spray when it is surprised or out of defence if it feels threatened and can spray a target which is about 4 to 5 meters away. After a full discharge it can take up to 10 days for the skunk to replenish the supply of liquid.

Due to the long period of time it takes to replenish its supply of liquid a skunk will prefer to retreat or flee any danger. Before spraying a target a skunk will usually give warning signs such as stamping its feet, clicking its teeth, growling, hissing, or raising its tail.

What remedy can I use to get rid of skunk spray?

The remedy which first comes to mind is the old fashioned tomato juice however this is more of a hindrance than a solution. Tomato juice only masks the scent of a skunk's spray vs breaking down the liquid, not to mention it is expensive and messy!

The modern remedy for breaking down skunk spray is to use the following recipe:

- 3-4 cups of hydrogen peroxide
- ¼ cup of baking soda
- 1 tsp of dish or select type of soap

Mix solution together and use as a shampoo on your sprayed animal or family member.

How many offspring can skunks have?

Skunks mate during the months of February and March and a female skunk can give birth to between 4 and 7 young. The baby skunks mature and begin to search for new homes by the fall and will travel about 6 to 10 km to find a new den to live in.

Are skunks a protected animal?

As per the *Agricultural Pest Act- Pest and Nuisance Control Regulation* skunks are not protected by law and have been declared a nuisance by the Province. **The use of poisons to kill nuisance skunks is illegal therefore land owners are not permitted to use poisons at any time.**

How can I prevent skunks from being attracted to or creating a den on my property?

The first line of defence against skunks is to ensure your property or area is free of all potential sources of food or living sites.

- Ensure all garbage is bagged and securely stored away.
- Only place garbage to the curb on the day when your garbage is scheduled.
- Maintain a clean and uncluttered yard free of rubbish and tall grass.
- Seal all openings around your garage, shed, house or other areas where a skunk may be able to dig underneath an object. Make sure the seal is all the way to the ground and if possible bury the seal (mesh or screen) into the ground by about 1-2 feet to discourage digging.

If a skunk is already living under a building or area:

- Seal all openings except the main entrance.
- Sprinkle a layer of flower or other powder outside the entrance.
- After dark inspect the powder for tracks and once the skunk has left seal the main entrance.
- Re-apply powder the following evening and reopen the entrance to allow any other skunks to leave before permanently closing the opening - Repeat the process as necessary to allow all skunks to leave the den.

Do not begin this practice from early May until mid-August as skunks are the most active and present during this time period.

What can I do to remove a skunk from a window well or hole?

Should a skunk be found to have fallen into a window well or other hole where it cannot escape provide the skunk with an escape route. Using a flat semi wide piece of wood or other stable material staple a piece of carpet which is the same length and width of the material to it or hammer nails into the material to create a ladder. Place the material on an angle into the window well or hole and leave the area. The skunk will eventually climb its own way out of the predicament it has found itself in.

Are there any repellents that can be used against skunks?

Other methods are required to permanently prevent or remove a skunk from a property. To deter a skunk from entering an enclosed area these repellents may have an effect:

- Lights
- Sounds
- Moth balls
- Ammonia soaked rags

Resources

- 1) [The information from this section was obtained from www.alberta.ca, Agriculture and Development.](http://www.alberta.ca)
- 2) [The Medicine River Wildlife Centre can provide resources on further tips to control skunks. They can be reached at:](#)

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