

Non chemical control of skunks

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Skunks are primarily carnivores. Insects are their preferred food, but mice make up most of their winter diet. Skunks begin breeding in late February and, after a gestation period of seven to 10 weeks, a litter of four to six is born. The normal home range has a diameter of between $\frac{1}{4}$ mile and two miles. But during breeding season, males may travel four to five miles each night. Skunks are dormant for about a month during the coldest part of winter. Skunks usually live in open lands bordering forests or brushy draws.

Skunks become problems when they visit homes or damage garden crops. They may burrow under porches or buildings, and they dig in gardens and lawns searching for insects and grubs. They make 3-4 inch cone-shaped holes when digging for grubs. Skunks occasionally kill poultry and eat eggs. They are a primary carrier of rabies in much of the country. A skunk acting unusually aggressive and active during the day may have rabies and should be approached with caution.

Certainly, the most common concern about skunks is their discharge of scent when they confront potential danger. Skunks have distinctive tracks with five toes on both the front and hind feet. Claw marks are usually visible. You can usually identify skunk droppings by the undigested insect parts they contain.

Habitat Modification

Skunks are often attracted to an area because of the availability of food or shelter. Remove pet food, garbage and any other food attractions such as compost piles and bird seed. It may be necessary to implement a rodent control program to eliminate this important food source.

Stack lumber at least two feet off the ground to discourage skunks from using them as shelter.

Exclusion

Plug all openings under buildings with wire mesh, sheet metal or concrete after you are certain that it is not being used by an animal.

Bury fencing 1 foot into the ground where skunks might gain access by digging. Bend the bottom six inches outward to make the buried fence more effective. Be sure to close doors at night and cover window wells or similar pits with mesh fencing.

If a skunk is already established under a building, you must take care not to enclose it inside. Sprinkling a layer of baking flour in front of the entrance the night before it is closed off will allow you to observe tracks. Close off the hole if there are no tracks or if the tracks are exiting only. Another way to determine if an animal is using a building is to place a “soft plug,” such as a paper towel or crumpled newspaper, in the hole and check the next day to see if it has been pushed out. If the soft plug is still intact, you can assume the skunk is not using the hole.

In spring be cautious about blocking young, non-mobile skunks inside the building. It may be necessary to delay trapping until the young skunks are moving about.

Repellents

There are no registered repellents for skunks. Mothballs and ammonia soaked clothes have been used as temporary repellents for skunks. Because of the great amount needed and the necessity to replace often, these are only very temporary solutions at best.

Trapping

Skunks can be removed from an area by trapping them. Because of the odor problems inherent in trapping skunks, cage and box traps are usually preferred to foothold traps. Remember to check your state’s regulations before using any type of trap.

Canned, fish-flavored cat food is the best bait for skunks. Before setting the trap, cover it with canvas (or other non-transparent material) to reduce the chances of the trapped skunk discharging its scent.

Always approach a trap slowly and quietly so you don’t upset a trapped skunk. If you plan to release a trapped skunk, take it at least 10 miles from the trap site. Skunks can be dispatched by drowning them while they are still in the cage trap.

Skunks that fall in window wells or pits should be allowed to remove themselves by climbing a cleated board. Nail one-inch by two-inch cleats, six inches apart to a board and slowly lower it into the well.

Skunks are mild-tempered and very tolerant of activity if it is very, very slow. Before discharging their scent, skunks usually provide a warning by stamping their forefeet and arching their tails over their backs. If a threat occurs, simply retreat quietly and slowly. Obviously, you should avoid loud noises and quick, aggressive actions.

Scent Discharge

The scent discharged by a skunk is persistent and difficult to remove. A formula has been developed to neutralize skunk odor. Mix one quart of three percent hydrogen peroxide with one-quarter cup baking soda and one teaspoon of liquid soap. Hydrogen peroxide is available from pharmacies. Soak the area, or pet, to be treated with water, scrub with the mixture and then rinse again in warm water. This solution may cause bleaching. Use cautiously because it may

turn your black lab into a chocolate lab. Also DO NOT STORE this mixture as it could explode. Always mix in an open container. Keep away from eyes and mouth.

If the scent is discharged in a room or under a building and the yellow discharge cannot be washed away, ventilate the area to speed up dissipation of the scent. Use ventilation fans to improve air circulation.

Acknowledgments

Much of the information presented here was adapted from S.E. Hygnstrom (1994) in Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE. Ideas from Colorado State University Extension were also included.

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