

# Skunk Prevention & Deterrent Techniques

*(Willowbrook Wildlife Center)*

The striped skunk is one of our more interesting mammals, with a unique striped black and white coat, bouncing walk, and an air of confidence. The confidence is the result of a remarkable defense system: glands beneath the skunk's tail produce an oily, sulfurous substance which the skunk can spray with dismaying accuracy (up to 10 feet), temporarily disabling the senses of a potential attacker and allowing the skunk to escape. Skunks are nocturnal burrowing members of the weasel family, with a diet that includes insects, other small animals, fruits and carrion. Many of the insects that skunks eat are bothersome to humans. **Here are some humane solutions to unwanted skunk situations.**

## Preventing Problems with Skunks

Skunks are at home in a variety of habitats but prefer forest borders where water is nearby. Common den and resting sites include abandoned woodchuck burrows, hollow logs, wood or rock piles, under buildings, elevated sheds, openings under concrete slabs and porches and access to crawl spaces under houses.

**Do not encourage skunks by unintentionally feeding them.**

- **Garbage cans:** Bring the cans inside where skunks cannot reach them. If this is not possible, pour 1 cup of ammonia inside the garbage can or sprinkle black pepper on the top bag inside the garbage can. Another deterrent is to place rags soaked in ammonia over the top of the garbage can lid and secure with bungee cords. Use the techniques for a 5 to 7 day period or use when putting garbage out for your weekly pick up.
- **Grubs:** Skunks and raccoons may tear up lawns in search of grubs. Treating your lawn for grubs will help to remove a favorite food source.
- **Gardens:** Surround your garden with a 3' high wire mesh fence, and place 1' of the wire mesh into the ground (skunks are not good climbers but are good diggers). Taste deterrents will work also, however they will need to be reapplied after a heavy dew or rain. Recommended taste deterrents are; mixing 2 tablespoons of hot sauce with 1 gallon of water, make a garlic puree and spray onto plants, sprinkle baby powder on the entire plant or check with your local nursery or home center for commercial products.
- **Pet Dishes:** Keep pet food and watering dishes inside, especially at night.
- **Bird Feeders:** Do not allow spillage to accumulate outside bird feeders.
- **Keep grills and barbecues clean.** Even the smallest food scraps may attract skunks.

**Eliminate Housing Options:**

- Cover window wells.
- Use welded wire to exclude animals from underneath decks, elevated sheds, openings under concrete slabs and porches. Secure outside access to crawl spaces.

## Recommended Deterrent Techniques for a Skunk Den on Your Property:

- Place lighting (e.g. bright flashlights, flood lamp, holiday lights, etc.) in their den. It is best to leave the lights on 24 hours a day. If this is not possible, the lights must be on during the daytime to disturb the animal's sleep.
- Play a radio (or anything that makes noise repeatedly) either in or near their den. It is best to leave the radio on 24 hours a day. If this is not possible, the radio must be on during the daytime to disturb the animal's sleep.
- Place rags soaked in ammonia in the den for one week. Ammonia has an irritating smell. Over time the ammonia will dissipate and it is important to re-soak the rags on a daily basis. \*VERY

**IMPORTANT\*** The WWC does not recommend using ammonia soaked rags during baby season (March - August). It may injure infant wildlife, which are too young to escape.

- Deterrent techniques should be used for at least 7 - 10 days and it is important to use all the techniques at the same time in order for the deterrents to be successful.
- To determine if the animal has left the den site, wad up newspaper and pack it into the den entrance (also helps hold in ammonia fumes). If the skunk is still using the den, the newspaper will be pulled out. If after a few days the newspaper has not been disturbed, securely repair any access openings. Failure to do so may result in the skunk or another animal moving in.

### Skunk Stuck in a Window Well

Two methods are recommended for getting skunks out of window wells.

- Place a roughed board at a 45° angle into the window well. Make sure the board is long enough to act as a ramp to the top. If you do not have a roughed board, wrap a towel or carpeting around the board to provide traction for the skunk. Remember they are not good climbers. Place fish scented cat food, Twinkies®, or Brie cheese at the top of the ramp to entice the skunk out. Skunks are nocturnal (active at night) and they may not leave the window well until night.
- Attach a string/rope to a 5-gallon bucket handle and lower the bucket into the window well with food placed inside the bucket to entice the skunk. Place the bucket on its side so the skunk is able to walk inside. Once the skunk is inside slowly raise the bucket up to ground level and place on its side away from you so the skunk can walk out. Try to stay out of the skunk's sight. You do not want to agitate him.

### Public Health Concerns

- While rabies is rare in the state of Illinois, skunks and bats are the wild animals that are most likely to be infected with the virus. In addition, skunks and bats can carry the rabies virus for a long time before exhibiting symptoms. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources requires all captured skunks to be euthanized. Because of the exposure risk, never handle a skunk, adult or juvenile.

### What Not To Do

- Trapping and removing skunks is illegal without the proper permits and is not always the solution to the problem. Removing the animal creates an open space for another animal. Trapped adults may be leaving young behind to die of starvation in an inaccessible area. Focus on removing the attraction, not the animal.
- Never move young from the nest. Contact Willowbrook Wildlife Center for advice at (630) 942-6200.
- Do not use poisons. They are inhumane and may be illegal. They can result in secondary poisoning of raptors, wild scavengers and neighborhood pets.

### When to Contact Willowbrook Wildlife Center

If you come across a wild animal and are concerned, leave it alone. Call Willowbrook Wildlife Center at (630) 942-6200 for advice. Young wild animals are not like human babies. Their parents do not constantly watch them, and they spend large amounts of time alone or with brothers and sisters.

- **If you find a skunk with visible wounds, contact your local police department. Due to the rabies virus exposure risk, do not attempt to capture the skunk. The seriousness of this disease has led The Illinois Department of Natural Resources to require that all wildlife rehabilitators, such as Willowbrook to euthanize skunks brought in.**
- Please call Willowbrook Wildlife Center before bringing an animal to the center. Call (630) 942-6200.
- Willowbrook is open daily from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas and New Year's Day.