

CONTROLLING SKUNKS

by Stan Rachesky
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The striped skunk is the most common of the species in the North Central States, though the little spotted skunk or "Civet cat" is abundant in Minnesota, Iowa, and westward. They are also abundant in the Chicagoland area.

Skunks are poor climbers and find most of their food on or near the ground. Their diet includes small rodents, snakes, frogs, carrion, fruits, berries, mushrooms, bird eggs, grubs and small insects.

They make their homes by enlarging existing holes, or by using the dens of other animals. Several families sometimes occupy the same den. Inhabited dens may be recognized by fresh droppings containing undigested insect parts near the mound or hole. Skunk hair and rub marks may also be present.

Skunks are a reservoir in the transmission of rabies. They have replaced foxes as the most important wild-life species spreading this dread disease.

A less serious, but common, complaint occurs when one or more skunks take up residence under buildings. While searching for grubs, skunks may frequently uproot lawns. This damage consists of small pits three or four inches across, or sometimes large sections of the turf are rolled back.

Rather than destroy skunks needlessly, it is better to exclude them from places where they may become a nuisance. If they are under a building, close all but one opening and sprinkle a little patch of flour in front of it. Examine this patch of flour after dark. If tracks show that the animals have departed, close the opening and seal it with cement, sheet metal or wire netting. Illuminating an area frequented by skunks often has a good repellent effect, causing them to seek cover elsewhere.

Where skunks have gotten into basement window wells or similar pits, from which they cannot escape, a board with cleats nailed at six-inch intervals can be cautiously lowered into the well. The skunk will then be able to climb out.

Skunks damage lawns by digging in them for the insect grubs. This damage can be greatly reduced or prevented by using soil insecticides to destroy the grub itself. Treat your lawn with Chlordane which can be purchased at a garden center or hardware store. Follow label directions for application rates. Make sure you use plenty of water. A hose-end sprayer will do a good job in placing this insecticide into the soil.

Skunks can be caught with No. 1 or 1½ steel traps set at the entrance to their den. When a den is used by more than one animal, time can be saved by setting several traps. The trap stake should be located far enough from the hole to keep the trapped animal in the open. Skunks are frequently taken in unbaited traps, but it is better to use the head of a fowl or a dead mouse as bait to attract them. In places where their scent would be objectionable, use baited box-traps or wire-cage traps covered with burlap.

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