

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



Illustration by Chris Hill

Evict Skunks Kindly from Your Property

In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.

Skunks have adapted well to human environments and have taken up residence in and around our homes. Here is some information about these animals and how they can be managed humanely and effectively, including how to neutralize their odor.

General Information

Skunks are beneficial, nonaggressive creatures with a unique system of self-defense. If you've noticed the persistent faint smell of a skunk, you may have one living around your home or yard. Look for a four-to-six-inch diameter hole near buildings or woodpiles or for a den under a porch or deck. Skunks are omnivorous, primarily eating insects, fruit, eggs, human garbage, and sometimes even small vertebrates such as mice. Skunks have adapted well to human environments and live happily under porches, patios, sheds, and decks as well as in hollow logs, wood or rock piles, and abandoned burrows. Young are usually born in May or June and remain in the nest for about two months before accompanying the mother to forage. Except when young are present, skunks are usually solitary animals. They are

primarily nocturnal and can be active throughout the year.

If you encounter a skunk, back away slowly and quietly and you should be able to avoid getting sprayed, since they don't see well and are unlikely to notice you unless you harass them. Signs that a skunk is about to spray include stamping the ground with its front feet, shaking

THE LIVING WITH WILDLIFE MISSION

The MSPCA Living With Wildlife program aims to protect wild species, now and in the future. The program promotes peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife in urban, suburban, and rural Massachusetts communities by helping to resolve human-animal conflicts in a humane, nonlethal, long-term, and cost-effective manner.

its tail, and fluffing its fur.

Possible Conflicts and Solutions

To discourage skunks from moving in with you:

- After exclusion, block or screen entry points to the spaces under your home and other buildings. Be sure the material used extends eight to ten inches underground because skunks are good burrowers.
- Fill openings under concrete structures with dirt.
- Remove all brush piles from your property.

To evict a skunk:

- Pack the entrance to its home

every day with leaves, straw, or other materials.

This will harass the skunk, and it may get the message and move elsewhere. This is the best approach in April, May, and June, when there may be young present, if tolerance until they get older is not a viable option.

- Use mild repellents, such as ammonia-soaked rags placed near or inside the burrow (to one side) so the skunk has to pass them to get out.
- If you are sure no young are present, install a one-way door over the den entrance, allowing the skunk to leave but preventing its reentry.
- If a skunk is caught in a window well, carefully and quietly place a rough board in the well so the animal can climb out. Skunks are not good climbers and need something to grip on to.
- Using shiny objects like pinwheels or Mylar balloons and sprinkling cayenne pepper around an area can help to deter skunks.

The following recipe to neutralize skunk odor is safe for pets and clothing. Combine:

1 quart of 3% peroxide

1/4 cup baking soda

1 tsp. liquid laundry or dish soap

In addition, using liberal amounts of tomato juice or vinegar will make the odor tolerable.

Public-Health Concerns

Like all mammals, skunks can carry