



Culver City Animal Services
4040 Duquesne Avenue
Culver City, California 90232
Tel: (310) 253-6143
Tel: (310) 837-1221
Fax (310) 253-6127
animal.services@culvercity.org



SKUNKS

Many people consider skunks odorous, obnoxious pests which should be avoided at all costs. However, these animals have some beneficial habits; they kill insects and rodents. The striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) is the most common species in California, although the smaller spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*) can be a local problem around dwellings. The striped skunk is a house-cat sized animal (4 - 10 lbs.) that has long black fur with two variable broad white stripes down the back. The head is triangular; the tail large and bushy. The strong musk characteristic of skunks is expelled from two scent glands near the anus. Skunks warn that they are about to spray by stamping their front feet and raising their tail with the fur fully extended. Because they are active at night, many people don't see the animals, even in areas with a large skunk population.

BIOLOGY

Skunks breed mainly between February to mid-March, but mating may occur from December through June. The gestation period is about 62 to 66 days. The female has one litter of four to eight young in May or early June who are fully weaned by the time they are two months old. The young usually begin to disperse by mid to late summer. Skunks are nocturnal, preferring to hunt at night. Although skunks are omnivores, they prefer to eat insects, particularly grasshoppers, beetles, and crickets. They also eat grubs and other insect larvae, and bees and wasps. When the opportunity arises, they will take mice, rats, moles, shrews, young ground squirrels and rabbits, nesting birds, nestlings, and bird or snake eggs. Skunks also eat corn, berries, and other vegetation. In an urban environment, they may eat garbage or pet food. Skunks will use any sheltered place as a den including wood piles, animal burrows, under homes, decks, and sheds. They are typically docile and prefer to avoid conflict.

DEFENSE MECHANISM

Skunks are well known for their method of defense. They have scent glands that produce a musk of butyl mercaptan, a strong, sulfur-smelling odor. When threatened, the skunk will raise its tail and stamp its front feet. If the predator or perceived threat does not back away, the skunk quickly twists its body into a U-shape and sprays the attacker.

DAMAGE

Skunks become a problem when their activities conflict with human interests. When skunks take shelter under homes, decks, or in garages, their presence is not usually tolerated by occupants of the building. All skunks have the ability to discharge a nauseating musk from their anal glands. They are capable of spraying their musk several times with accuracy to about 10 feet. Confrontation with pets often results in the pet being sprayed or bitten. Skunks can also cause severe damage to gardens and lawns by their digging activities. While searching for grubs and other subsoil insects, skunks frequently uproot turf and other plants. This damage consists of small pits ranging from 3 to 5 inches across, or sometimes large sections of sod are rolled back.

DISEASE

All wildlife species can carry diseases and parasites. Skunks are known carriers of rabies (rare), canine distemper, encephalitis, histoplasmosis, trypanosomiasis, coccidiosis, toxoplasmosis, tularemia, tuberculosis, listeriosis, leptospirosis, roundworms and mange. They can also be infested with fleas, ticks, lice and mites that are known transmitters of disease.

ODOR REMOVAL



Skunk spray on pets can be neutralized by using the following procedure:

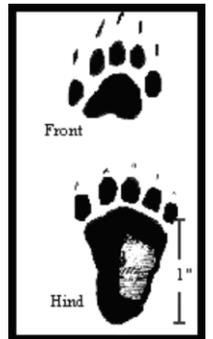
- 1) Bathe the animal in a mixture of 1 quart of 3% hydrogen peroxide (from drug store), ¼ cup of baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) and a teaspoon of liquid detergent. Do not add water to the mixture. The mixture must be used immediately after mixing and will not work if it is stored for any length of time.
- 2) After 5 minutes, rinse the animal with water.
- 3) Repeat if necessary.

Do **NOT** store the mixture in a closed container; it releases oxygen gas and thus could break the container. This solution can be used to wash skin, clothes, dogs, etc. that have been sprayed by skunks. Due to the peroxide, it may lighten the fur of pets.

REMOVING SKUNKS FROM BENEATH A BUILDING

The following steps are suggested for removing skunks under buildings:

- 1) Seal all possible entrances, except one (the main entrance).
- 2) Sprinkle a band of flour 2 feet wide on the ground in front of the remaining opening.
- 3) Place a light or strobe under the building; skunks do not like bright light. There are strobe lights set up for skunks, rats and other pest animals. Search online under “rodent strobe.”
- 4) After dark, check for tracks on the band of flour.
- 5) When tracks indicate the skunk has departed the building (but not returned!), close the last entrance.



PROBLEM PREVENTION

Wildlife is an important part of our environment. Raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, opossums, skunks, mallard ducks, Canada geese, and foxes can all be found in Culver City. They have adapted to or have found the modification we have made to the area appealing. While these animals are seldom a threat to people or domestic animals, there are several steps you can take to discourage wild animals from becoming a recurring problem. Skunks are attracted to urban areas by the easy accessibility of food, water and shelter. Eliminating the availability of all these factors will encourage skunks to leave. Prevention is the key to dealing with these wildlife nuisances and is the best all around solution to the problem both for the people and the wildlife. Addressing a problem requires much more work than prevention and is not nearly as satisfactory or effective. A common misconception is that setting a live trap, catching and destroying the wildlife animal will take care of the nuisance. However, before too long another raccoon, skunk or opossum will move into the area. If it was a good habitat for one, it's just as good for another. Urban wildlife enjoy the easy life we often unknowingly provide for them; they don't like a hostile environment. Taking steps to deter them will encourage them to move on.

- Install a motion-activated or motion-sensored sprinkler. The motion-activated sprinkler can detect activity and when activated, it delivers a burst of water. The combination of the water spray, noise, and the motion of the sprinkler head is often effective at scaring off animal intruders and deterring skunks from specific areas near your home or garden. Check online search engines for videos of the motion-sensored sprinkler system in action. Internet stores sell the motion-sensored sprinkler devices for approximately \$45. Home improvement stores also carry the device for about \$100.



- Use metal or heavy plastic trash containers with tight fitting lids. Secure the lids with bungee cords, rope or sturdy cords. You may want to soak the cords or rope in a hot sauce or a commercial repellent. Spray a small amount of ammonia in and around all garbage cans. You may want to pour a cup of ammonia in the trash can every week after the trash has been picked up. Animals don't like the smell and will be discouraged from digging in your trash. Most animals invade human space when searching and foraging for food. If the food supply is easier to obtain elsewhere, the animals are more likely to leave your property alone.



- Each fall and spring, inspect the exterior of your home for entrances that wildlife animals can use to get into the crawl space under your house. Even a skunk does not need a large hole to enter. Make sure soffit vents and gable end vents are fastened securely. If you find vent grilles open or crawl spaces open under your house, you will need to secure the openings to prevent the easy access. You can attach ¼-inch hardware cloth over the vent on the inside of the attic for extra security. Plug gaps between your foundations and sill plates. Cover foundation vents with slotted metal vent covers.



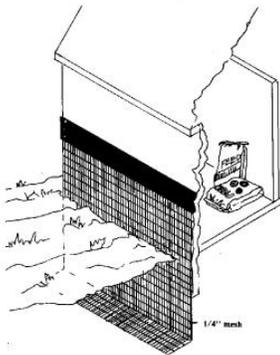
*L-Shaped screen application around foundation.****

- If the skunks have been residing in your yard for a while, it is not just food that has them remaining in your yard. The skunks probably have a den. Particularly in March through May, you should consider that skunks might have several babies hidden in your yard. A den dug out under your shed, behind the wood pile, or under the house are all ideal spots for a young skunk mother. Identify exactly where the den is and how the skunk accesses the site. Set up a portable radio and play music. The constant sound is not ideal for growing babies and the mom will begin to get restless. You may want to soak tennis balls in ammonia and toss a few into the area of the den. For best results, do this just before dusk. A mother skunk will start to move her babies as soon as night falls. It may take her more than one night to move all her babies. You will want to check the den to make sure all the babies have been moved and then fill in the hole with dirt and close up the access points by burying wood, rock, or a wire mesh into the area. You will want to bury your blockade by at least six inches to make sure the skunks cannot dig their way back in.



*Power supply hole sealed with metal flashing.**

- If skunks take up residence under a low deck, they may be excluded by using ¼-inch grid screening or solid metal flashing. Trench around the perimeter of the deck a minimum of 12 inches deep, insert screening in trench, and backfill. Attach top of screening to facade of deck with nails or fence post staples. Before completing final seal on the last entry point, it is wise to make sure no animals are trapped inside. On the night before completing repairs, sprinkle flour in the entrance hole and check for tracks the following morning. If no tracks are evident for three consecutive nights, no animals are likely present. You may wish to make a temporary one-way exit using ¼-inch grid screening. Form the screening into a cone or funnel shape that will permit animals to leave but not to reenter. The large end should be sized to encircle the entry hole and be attached over the hole to the facade of the deck or building with nails or fence post staples. The small end should face away from the house and be 4 to 6 inches in diameter.



- Skunks are not inclined to break through walls or fences that are intact and in reasonably good condition. Fix any openings or weak or loose places. It's much easier to prevent skunks from taking refuge under your deck or in burrows around your home than to deal with the problem. Skunks like to dig at the edge or the corner of a building or structure. You can discourage this behavior by placing hardware cloth six inches beneath the ground surface. Extend it out away from the base of your deck, tool shed foundation or other applicable structure by at least three feet. Most wildlife animals will prefer to dig right next to the structure and when they can't get through the hardware cloth, they will go somewhere else. The hardware cloth can then be covered by lattice work, or other cosmetic treatments, to improve the appearance.



- Pet food is high in protein, carbohydrates and fats. By having your pet's food available, it discourages skunks from their normal hunting and foraging behavior and will keep the skunks returning to your property and yard. Pets should be fed during daylight hours and any leftovers removed immediately. Empty or remove the water bowls at night. Be sure to lock pet doors and openings at night



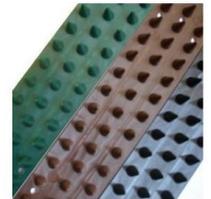
- If you have vegetables in your garden or fruit trees in your yard, use a basic wire fence to surround your low-lying plants as they ripen and pick up all fruit when it drops off the tree. If you leave it exposed, it is just another food source for the skunks.



- Skunks digging in your yard do not necessarily indicate that you have a skunk problem. You may actually have an insect problem in your lawn. Sod webworm and other larvae are abundant and the skunks are taking care of the problem for you. Call your local garden center and inquire how to effectively manage your insect problem. An effective way to get rid of grubs is by using an all natural solution, beneficial nematodes. Beneficial nematodes are underground pest hunters that control over 250 different species of ground insects. They are a very efficient organic insect control method and kill most insects before they become adults. The nematodes may take a week or more to rid your yard of grubs and the skunk will continue digging for a few days after that before they decide there are no more tasty morsels to uncover. Removing the insect infestation will remove the skunks' food source and thereby the skunks.



- An important part of deterring skunks from your garden is securing your perimeter. An effective method of doing this is to install plastic or polypropylene security spike deterrent strips on your fences to eliminate the most common ways that skunks will get into your garden. The plastic spikes are designed to provide maximum discomfort and minimum harm. Please be advised that metal spikes or barbs on fencing are not permitted within Culver City. (Culver City Municipal Code 17.300.030)
- If you wish to have someone trap and remove the skunk, you can hire a private nuisance wildlife control operator which generally can be found in the Yellow Pages under "Animal Removal Services." If you do consider a professional wildlife removal specialist who has the required permits to legally trap and remove wildlife, please keep in mind that removal of nuisance wildlife does not necessarily mean that you have removed the problem. Oftentimes, removing the animal just opens up space for another animal to move in and claim territory.



Your best solution would be to make your home and property inhospitable and unappealing to the unwanted animals with habitat modifications and exclusion methods.

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The California Department of Fish and Game regulations prohibit the relocation of skunks or other healthy wildlife. Healthy wildlife "trapped in towns or cities or removed from under buildings or otherwise taken or trapped because of human/animal conflict shall be immediately released in the area where trapped or disposed of (euthanized) as directed or authorized by the Department (of Fish and Game)." Only authorized wildlife rehabilitators may keep injured or orphaned wildlife.

(California Fish & Game Code 4000, 4001, 4180 and California Code of Regulations Title 14 Section 465.5(g)(1) and 679(f))

The Culver City Animal Services Officer is not trained in euthanasia techniques. Due to Fish and Game regulation, the Animal Services Officer cannot transport or relocate any healthy wild animal. Therefore, Culver City Animal Services does not provide healthy skunk trapping and/or removal services. If citizens have a routine healthy skunk issue, they should contact a licensed private contractor of their choosing and citizens will be responsible for any cost incurred.

The Culver City Animal Services Officer will respond to calls for service ONLY if the skunk is inside the living residence (not under the house, not around the house, not in the crawlspace, not in the yard, not in the attic, and not in a trap), is sick, is injured, is orphaned (for babies and the young), or is deceased.