

Living with Skunks

The striped skunk is about the size of an adult house cat. Its fur is mostly black with white on its neck and head. As with most striped skunks, the white extends down the back and through the tail. However, skunks can be totally black, too. The spotted skunk is about half the size of a mature house cat and as the name implies, it has spots. The fur coat is for the most part black with random white spots.

Spotted and striped skunks mate once a year – February to March – and their young are usually born in April or June. That makes gestation nearly 63 days long. Their litters usually number five or six, but there can be as many as ten.

Skunks are omnivorous in general, eating anything from acorns, to small rodents. Searching for food in soil, they are known to uproot gardens and lawns. Skunks are nocturnal, and leave their burrowed homes (which may be in the ground, under buildings, or beneath wood piles) just after sunset to search for food. They usually return by sunrise.

Geographically speaking, skunks are found throughout the U.S. They are, however, partial to semi-open country and bushlands, and never further than two miles from water.

To discourage skunks from romping around your property or from making their homes beneath yours try:

– A three-foot-high wire mesh fence, extended six inches beneath the ground surface. Spotted skunks may scale this fence once in a while, but

this type of activity is rare. To deter these climbing, agile skunks, erect the fence at an angle.

– Seal any and all entrances or openings in porches, foundations, and outside stairways.

– If a skunk has already made a home beneath yours, you have to be a little more patient and think of a solution. You must make sure the skunk is out of its home before you seal off its entrance.



The best way to determine when the skunk is out is to track it. Do this by spreading a smooth layer of flour (1" thick) near the suspected entrance. Examine the flour just after dark. It's safe to block the entrance when the tracks are leading outward.

– Initiate an insect control program. Controlling their prey will also help you control them.

– Repellents can be helpful. However, they are just a temporary solution. Most commercial repellents only keep skunks away for two to four weeks. Rain or heavy dew quickly washes most repellents away.

If you have any questions or encounter specific problems when dealing with wildlife, please call the Marin Humane Society at 415.883.4621 or go to MarinHumaneSociety.org.

