

Damage Prevention and Control Methods

Exclusion

Keep skunks from denning under buildings by sealing off all foundation openings. Cover all openings with wire mesh, sheet metal, or concrete. Bury fencing 1 1/2 to 2 feet (0.4 to 0.6 m) where skunks can gain access by digging. Seal all ground-level openings into poultry buildings and close doors at night. Poultry yards and coops without subsurface foundations may be fenced with 3-foot (1-m) wire mesh fencing. Bury the lowest foot (0.3 m) of fencing with the bottom 6 inches (15.2 cm) bent outward from the yard or building. Skunks can be excluded from window wells or similar pits with mesh fencing. Place beehives on stands 3 feet (1 m) high. It may be necessary to install aluminum guards around the bases of hives if skunks attempt to climb the supports. Skunks, however, normally do not climb. Use tight-fitting lids to keep skunks out of garbage cans.

Habitat Modification

Properly dispose of garbage or other food sources that will attract skunks. Skunks are often attracted to rodents living in barns, crawl spaces, sheds, and garages. Rodent control programs may be necessary to eliminate this attraction.

Debris such as lumber, fence posts, and junk cars provide shelter for skunks, and may encourage them to use an area. Clean up the area to discourage skunks.

Frightening

Lights and sounds may provide temporary relief from skunk activity.

Repellents

There are no registered repellents for skunks. Most mammals, including skunks, can sometimes be discouraged from entering enclosed areas with moth balls or moth flakes (naphthalene). This material needs to be used in sufficient quantities and replaced often if it is to be effective. Ammonia-soaked cloths may also repel skunks. Repellents are only a temporary measure. Permanent solutions require other methods.

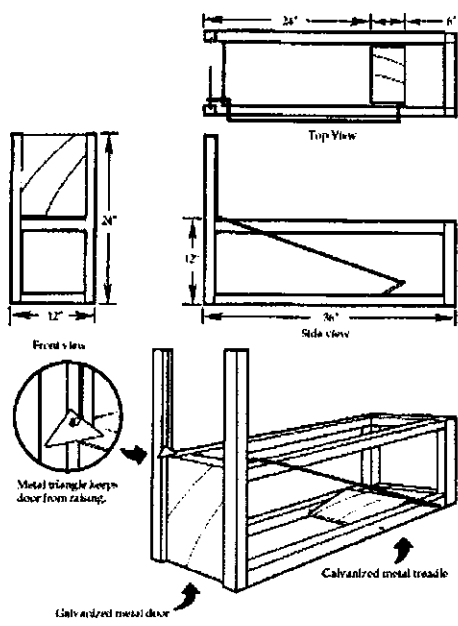
Toxicants

No toxicants are registered for use in controlling skunks.

Fumigants

Two types of gas cartridges are registered for fumigating skunk burrows. Fumigation kills skunks and any other animals present in the burrows by suffocation or toxic gases. Follow label directions and take care to avoid fire hazards when used near structures.

Trapping



Box Traps. Skunks can be caught in live traps set near the entrance to their den. When a den is used by more than one animal, set several traps to reduce capture time. Live traps can be purchased or built. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate traps that can be built easily. Consult state wildlife agency personnel before trapping skunks.

Use canned fish-flavored cat food to lure skunks into traps. Other food baits such as peanut butter, sardines, and chicken entrails are also effective. Before setting live traps, cover them with canvas to reduce the chances of a trapped skunk discharging its scent. The canvas creates a dark, secure environment for the animal. Always approach a trap slowly and quietly to prevent upsetting a trapped skunk. Gently remove the trap from the area and release or kill the trapped skunk.

Captured skunks should be transported at least 10 miles (16 km) and released in a habitat far from human dwellings. Attach a length of heavy string or fishing line to the trap cover and release the skunk from a distance. Removing and transporting a livetrapped skunk may appear to be a precarious business, but if the trap is completely covered, it is a proven, effective method for relocating a skunk. If the skunk is to be killed, the US Department of Agriculture recommends shooting or euthanization with CO₂.

Leghold Traps. Leghold traps should not be used to catch skunks near houses because of potential problem of scent discharge. To remove a live skunk caught in a leghold trap, a veterinarian or wildlife official may first inject it with a tranquilizer, then remove it from the trap for disposal or release elsewhere.

Shooting

Skunks caught in leghold traps may be shot. Shooting the skunk in the middle of the back to sever the spinal cord and paralyze the hind quarters may prevent the discharge of scent. Shooting in the back should be followed immediately by shooting in the head. Most people who shoot trapped skunks should expect a scent discharge.

Other Methods

Skunk Removal. The following steps are suggested for removing skunks already established under buildings.

1. Seal all possible entrances along the foundation, but leave the main burrow open.
2. Sprinkle a layer of flour 2 feet (0.6 m) in circumference on the ground in front of the opening.
3. After dark, examine the flour for tracks which indicate that the skunk has left to feed. If tracks are not present, reexamine in an hour.
4. After the den is empty, cover the remaining entrance immediately. Reopen the entrance the next day for 1 hour after dark to allow any remaining skunks to exit before permanently sealing the entrance.

A wooden door suspended from wire can be improvised to allow skunks to leave a burrow but not to reenter. Burrows sealed from early May to mid-August may leave young skunks trapped in the den. If these young are mobile they can usually be box-trapped easily using the methods previously described. Where skunks have entered a garage, cellar, or house, open the doors to allow the skunks to exit on their own. Do not prod or disturb them. Skunks trapped in cellar window wells or similar pits may be removed by nailing cleats at 6-inch (15-cm) intervals to a board. Lower the board into the well and allow the skunk to climb out on its own. Skunks are mild-tempered animals that will not defend themselves unless they are cornered or harmed. They usually provide a warning before discharging their scent, stamping their forefeet rapidly and arching their tails over their backs. Anyone experiencing such a threat should retreat quietly and slowly. Loud noises and quick, aggressive actions should be avoided.

Odor Removal. [Editor's Note: We recommend that readers interested in odor control consult more recent information] Many individuals find the smell of skunk musk nauseating. The scent is persistent and difficult to remove. Diluted solutions of vinegar or tomato juice may be used to eliminate most of the odor from people, pets, or clothing. Editor's note: These methods are not effective. Clothing may also be soaked in weak solutions of household chloride bleach or ammonia. On camping trips, clothing can be smoked over a cedar or juniper fire. Neutrolem alpha is a scent-masking solution that can be applied to the sprayed area to reduce the odor. It is available through some commercial cleaning suppliers and the local USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services office. Walls or structural areas that have been sprayed by skunks can be washed down with vinegar or tomato juice solutions or sprayed with neutrolem alpha. Use ventilation fans to speed up the process of odor dissipation. Where musk has entered the eyes, severe burning and an excessive tear flow may occur. Temporary blindness of 10 or 15 minutes may result. Rinse the eyes with water to speed recovery. [For more up to date information on deodorizing click deodorizing]

Economics of Damage and Control

Skunks should not be needlessly destroyed. They are highly beneficial to farmers, gardeners, and landowners because they feed on large numbers of agricultural and garden pests. They prey on field mice and rats, both of which may girdle trees or cause health problems. Occasionally they eat moles, which cause damage to lawns, or insects such as white grubs, cutworms, potato beetle grubs, and other species that damage lawns, crops, or hay.

Skunks occasionally feed on ground-nesting birds, but their impact is usually minimal due to the large abundance of alternative foods. Skunks also feed on the eggs of upland game birds and waterfowl. In waterfowl production areas, nest destruction by egg-seeking predators such as skunks can significantly reduce reproduction. The occasional problems caused by the presence of skunks are generally outweighed by their beneficial habits. Some people even allow skunks to den under abandoned buildings or woodpiles. Unless skunks become really bothersome, they should be left alone. An economic evaluation of the feeding habits of skunks shows that only 5% of the diet is made up of items that are economically valuable to people.

The hide of the skunk is tough, durable, and able to withstand rough use. Generally there is little market for skunk pelts but when other furbearer prices are high, skunks are worth pelting.