

Skunks

Urban Wildlife Relationships



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Did you know?

Skunks' stripes are a type of aposematism. This means that the high contrast colour of their fur is actually a warning sign to other animals to stay away! Why do you think other animals would want to stay away from skunks?



Did you know?

Skunks will **ONLY** spray if they feel threatened. They actually only have enough spray for 3-4 shots, and then it takes them 2 weeks to make more.



Did you know?

Skunk babies are called kits! Once a skunk has survived its first winter, it can live up to seven years in the wild.

Myth Busting

MYTH : The best way to get rid of the smell of skunk spray is tomato juice.

REALITY : Tomato juice doesn't actually get rid of the smell; it just covers it up. To actually lift the spray oils from skin and fabric, a combination of hydrogen-peroxide, baking soda, and dish soap is best.

MYTH : Skunks are blind and aggressive.

REALITY : It's true that skunks have poor eyesight, but they aren't actually blind. They can see clearly a few feet in front of them. Because their eyesight is poor, fast movement can scare them and they might react defensively. However, they only actually spray, charge, or hiss when they feel threatened, and they generally will not physically attack.

MYTH : Skunks are inherently stinky animals.

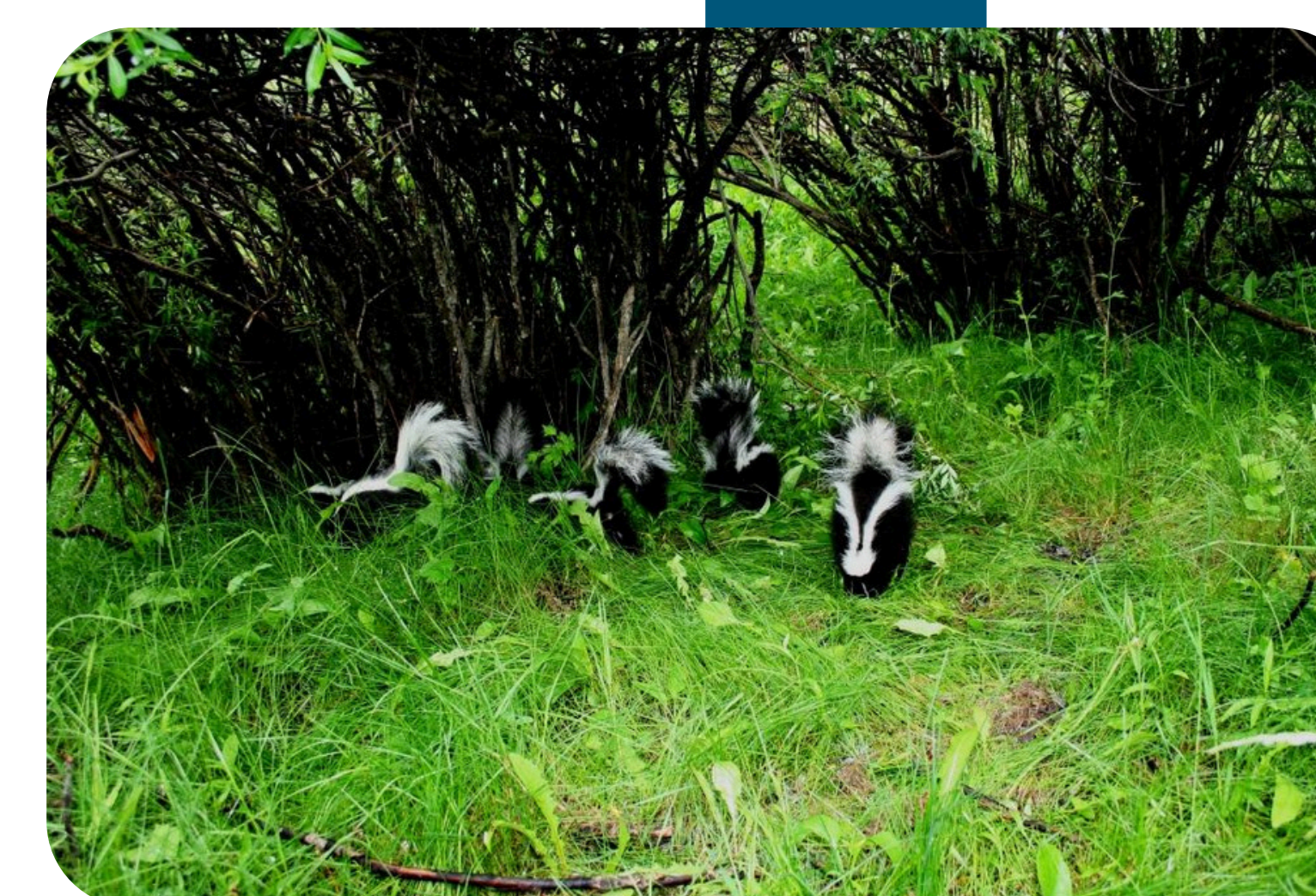
REALITY : The only thing that makes a skunk more stinky than other animals is its spray! And since they will only spray as a last line of defense, these animals are not always as stinky as you might think. Skunks also have a really strong sense of smell, and so they also avoid spraying in enclosed spaces, or near their own dens.



Ecological Niche

Skunks are *omnivores*, and so they eat both plants and other animals. They are also *scavengers*, which means that they'll eat a wide variety of foods depending on what they're able to find. This means that if you have any garbage or food scraps that are left outside, it may attract skunks.

Skunks are also important prey for one other animal. Since they can defend themselves with spray, they don't have many predators, but their one regular predator in Alberta is the great horned owl. These owls aren't deterred by the spray because they actually have no sense of smell.



Scat and Tracks

Skunk tracks show all of their five toes on each foot, making them distinct from many other wildlife tracks. They also have small claws above each toe. Their hind feet are bigger than the front feet, with a larger pad beneath the toes. Skunk scat has a similar shape to cat scat, but might have bits of insects, berry seeds, fur, or feathers.

Skunk Spray Warning Signs

1. Raised tail
2. Stomping feet
3. Hissing
4. Charging forward and back

Safety Tips

Skunks are not actually dangerous, but we can still think of ways to keep skunks safe from humans, and to protect ourselves from getting sprayed.

1. Give skunks lots of room
2. Pack away garbage with a tight lid
3. Watch out for skunks on the road
4. Keep pets on a leash or supervise them closely
5. Teach your friends and family about skunks
6. Watch for spray warning signs!



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