



Skunks

Description and habitat

The primary species of skunk seen in Thornton is the striped skunk. This is the familiar black skunk with the white stripe down its back. These animals have adapted very well to living in suburban and urban areas, and can be found under sheds, foundations, and porches. They are omnivores, or in other words, they will pretty much eat anything.

Behaviors

Skunks are usually nocturnal, coming out well after dark, and heading back to their den around dawn. They breed in the spring from February to May, have a gestation period of 9 weeks, and have approximately 5-8 young per litter. These babies will stay with the mother until they are 2-4 months old, and sometimes even longer. In the winter months they are known as semi-hibernators. They may sleep for days when the weather is bad, and then come out to forage when the weather clears. They are curious animals, which sometimes gets them into trouble. They do not climb well, but are excellent diggers.

Benefits

Because skunks will eat just about anything, this can be a positive benefit for homeowners. They will eat dead animals, and are known to eat mice (especially babies), insects and larvae. They are also incredibly cute, especially as babies!

Common Problems and Solutions

Skunks under cement slabs and porches

If the area is fairly enclosed, you can try tying rags into tight knots, and soaking the rags in ammonia. Push the rags into the enclosed area after the skunk has left (You can determine this by putting white flour by the entrance/exit you think the skunk is using. When you see the footprints in the flour going out, you know the skunk has gone). Continue to do this for a couple of nights, until the skunk becomes discouraged, and decides to find another place to den. You can also try shining lights on the area, and placing a radio on a talk show by the area

you think the skunk is in. All of these methods will discourage the skunk as the area will no longer be the quiet sanctuary they are looking for. Once the skunk has left, you will need to block the entrance using a heavy gauge wire mesh, so that the skunk cannot dig or chew its way back in. Sink the wire into the ground so that if the skunk digs, it will still hit the wire barrier.

Chewing/eating things and on the premises

If a skunk is coming onto your property or into a specific area, you can try some of the commercial products on the market to keep them away. Pet stores and garden centers carry products such as Repel, Boundary, and Dog-Gone to keep animals away. You can also use cayenne pepper sprinkled on or around an area to keep them away. Make your own repellent by mixing cayenne pepper with water and spraying onto the area/object affected. All of these methods would need to be reapplied if it rains or after a few days, but hopefully by then the skunk has learned to avoid them.

Trapping

We have learned that trapping is not an effective method for dealing with wildlife. If the habitat is there to support the animal, even if you remove individuals others will move into the vacated space to take advantage of the resources. A much better long-term solution is to modify the habitat so that it is not suitable for the animal. It is also illegal in the state of Colorado to use any type of trap that would cause harm to the animal, such as leg-hold traps.



Skunks in window wells

If a skunk should fall into a window well, you can provide a ramp made of a rough surface for them to climb out. They are not good climbers, so the ramp must have a material on it that the skunk can get a good grip on with its claws. Place the ramp at an angle in the window well. The skunk may not climb out until dark. You may want to invest in window well covers so that nothing else can fall into the well in the future.

If your pet gets sprayed

There are commercial products available at pet supply stores that will remove skunk odor. You can also make your own solution by mixing 1 quart of hydrogen peroxide, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of baking soda, and 1-2 tsp of liquid dish soap. Bathe your animal in the solution, taking care to keep it out of the eyes. Leave on for 5 minutes, then rinse thoroughly. (Caution – the mixture must be used fresh and not stored. It may bleach your animal's fur. Do not use on clothing).

