

Nature Week at Heritage Village - Sept. 20th

Skunk



One of the most ubiquitous of our animals is the skunk. It can live in almost any habitat, is found around the globe, and eats almost anything. Its diet includes insects, small mammals, grains, berries, and nuts. Unfortunately they dig holes in your yard to eat grubs and are the prime predators of honeybees, scratching at the beehive until the

guard bees emerge to get eaten. But the world is about eating and being eaten. Their greatest predator is the Great Horned Owl which is not deterred by the odor because this owl has such a poor sense of smell.

Skunks hunt at dusk and dawn but are active all night. They retreat to their ground den during the day. They like to sleep under your porch or shed where you may unexpectedly find them. Be warned that while the males sleep alone the females sleep in groups. So if you roust one, you may roust several. By the way, skunks are our biggest threat of rabies, followed by raccoons. Normally skunks do not bite so if you or your pet are bitten be sure to get immediately help.

Their odor is their ultimate defense mechanism, only sprayed out reluctantly after hissing, feet stamping, and tail raising fail to work. They are reluctant to spray because their body takes up to 10 days to replenish their spray reservoir. They only carry enough for five short sprays. So they try every other defense in their arsenal before using the spray as their last resort. And when they do squirt they are accurate in their aim up to 10 feet. They aim for the eyes because the spray can cause temporary blindness allowing the skunk time to escape.

The sprayed chemicals are called thiols, the same chemical group used to put odor into natural gas. Human noses are extremely sensitive to these smells. Skunks emit two types of smelly thiols. One group smells upon release while a second group smells later once it gets wet. This second group explains why on damp days your dog or house, weeks after receiving a spray, may again smell like skunk.

Armed with this information here is the best remedy for skunk spray, and it is definitely not tomato juice. Never wet the sprayed area. Instead use the common household chemicals, hydrogen peroxide and baking soda, to oxidize the thiols.

Humane Society's Recipe for Removing Skunk Smell

Mix:

- 1 quart 3% hydrogen peroxide
- ¼ cup baking soda
- 2 teaspoons dish-washing liquid

Lather the mixture into your pet's dry coat from the collar back toward the tail. Don't pour it near the eyes because the hydrogen peroxide can burn. For the pet's face use a sponge to apply the solution.

Rub the solution around for about five minutes or until the skunk's smell starts to dissipate.

Do a complete rinse once the smell starts to decrease, then repeat the entire process again, up to five times. The final rinse should be very thorough.



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