

SKUNKS, and what to do.....

Breeding season typically occurs from February through March. In late April to early June, the female will excavate a den and give birth to 2–10 kits, which are born blind and helpless. If disturbed, females will move their kits to a new den. The kits do not leave the den until they are approximately 6 to 8 weeks old. When they leave the den, the kits follow their mother in search of food and will den with her in alternate dens until they are independent at two to five months. The average lifespan of a skunk in the wild is about 2–3 years, but they can live up to 15 years in captivity. During the summer months, skunks typically sleep in retreats above ground; shaded areas in tall grass, under shrubs, in thickets, or under decks and building. They do not show much fidelity to above ground retreats, but will re-visit them from time to time. Skunks are not true hibernators. When nighttime temperatures are above 30°F, skunks become active for periods of time. Thus, dog owners should beware on unusually warm winter nights. Skunks will be out and about, stretching their legs and searching for food. When temperatures stay below freezing, however, skunks will sleep to conserve energy.

Reasons Why A Skunk Can Be Active During The Day

One of the biggest reasons that skunks can be active during the day is that the animal is pregnant or has already given birth, as the process of rearing her young can sometimes cause a female skunk to become active at unusual times of day. There are also some situations where skunks will have learned to be active at a certain time. For example, skunks increase scavenging particularly in urban areas when the scent of garbage on collection day may encourage the animal to be active on that morning. So bottom line, no, a skunk that is active outside during daylight hours does not necessarily have rabies. In fact, it very likely doesn't. Seeing a skunk out in daylight is not a cause for panic. These animals are primarily nocturnal, but they are often active during the day. People have been bombarded with myths about wildlife since childhood. Generally, if you leave them alone, they will leave you alone. The way to tell if it has rabies is if it is acting very sick! Staggering, wandering aimlessly, shaking, and foaming. If it looks like it is alert and moving with purpose, it's healthy, and engaging in normal daytime behavior.

Tips for residents

Skunks, like many other wild animals, can thrive in suburban and urban areas. If you want to make your property less attractive to skunks and avoid having any problems, follow these basic practices. Remember, share these tips with your neighbors; your efforts will be futile if neighbors provide food or shelter for skunks.

Remain calm

Should you encounter a skunk, speak softly and move away in order to give it room to leave. Once you back away, the skunk will no longer feel threatened and will move off. If it doesn't, try clapping your hands and making some noise from a safe distance.

Secure your garbage

Skunks will raid open trash materials and compost piles. Secure your garbage in tough plastic containers with tight fitting lids and keep them in secure buildings when possible. Take out trash the morning pick up is scheduled, not the previous night. Keep compost piles in containers designed to contain but vent the material.

Keep bird feeder areas clean

Use feeders designed to keep seed off the ground as the seeds can attract skunks. Remove bird feeders if skunks are seen regularly around your yard.

Pet owners

To help prevent your pet from being sprayed, turn on a flood light and check your yard for skunks before letting your dog out at night. Additionally, feed pets indoors. Outdoor feeding attracts skunks and other wild animals.

Liquid and Granular Skunk Repellents

Available in liquid or granular form, [skunk repellent](#) is safe, comprised of all natural ingredients that repel skunks effectively without harming them. Simply sprinkle or spray the repellent around your property, and the taste, smell and touch of the repellent will drive skunks away.

ELECTRONIC SKUNK REPELLENTS Electronic Skunk Repellents

The [motion detector sprinkler](#) is an effective skunk repellent because it uses fear to condition the animal to stay away. It senses the heat and motion of nuisance animals. Once detected, the repellent sprays a burst of water while creating a “ticking” sound—startling the animal and shooing it away. The noise, motion and spray of the repellent will make skunks reluctant to venture back into your yard. So, take these steps to spruce up your home, then get an effective skunk repellent to keep them away!

Skunks are an important and valuable natural resource in Massachusetts. They are classified as a furbearer species, for which a regulated trapping season and management program have been established.

If you are experiencing problems with skunks or have questions, contact your nearest MassWildlife office.

Animal Control Officer Jack Strack