



A potent problem: Dealing with backyard skunks

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If you live in a rural area, then most likely you have a skunk story to tell.

Wyoming is home to three species of skunks: Western spotted, Eastern spotted, and the striped skunk. The striped skunk is the most prevalent in Wyoming. While skunks are interesting from a biological perspective, most people just want to know how to get rid of the potent creature hanging out in their backyard.

Attractants

Skunks are omnivores, meaning they will eat just about anything. This is probably the number one reason why skunks hang out on your property: They have found a food source.

Growing up in rural Wyoming, my family dealt with skunks a few times. One instance I vividly remember was opening the back door and coming face to face with a big old skunk. We fed our cats on the back porch and the skunk figured this out.

Pet food and unsecured trash cans are the most common attractants for these smelly critters. Keep skunks out of the trash by storing the garbage can in a shed or garage until the day of pickup, or get a can with a lid that can be secured.

Eggs can be another unintentional food source, especially with free range chickens. To avoid encounters with skunks, secure your chickens at night and collect eggs each morning.

Prevention

Besides making sure there are no food sources around your property, you also need to make sure you don't provide skunks any places to set up house. They make dens under sheds, wood piles, brush piles, or just about any place they can get under. Make sure these areas are not accessible.

For example, to prevent skunks from digging under a shed, you may need to run a chicken wire fence around its base. Fold the chicken wire fence in half and attach half of it to the shed and the other half to the ground. If you suspect you already have a skunk living under your shed, you will want to remove it before you do this so that it doesn't die under there and cause a real stink.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department suggests using mothballs, moth crystals, or ammonia-soaked rags to repel and temporarily exclude fox, squirrels, and skunks, especially from dens in undesirable locations. Of course, permanent exclusion is the preferred solution. Visit <https://bit.ly/wgfd-skunks> to learn more.

Removal

To remove a problem skunk, you can trap it yourself or you can hire someone. Call your local Wyoming Game and Fish office for assistance with finding trappers for hire in your area.

If you want to trap the skunk yourself, the best option is a live trap, which can be purchased at many farm stores. A little cat food or tuna fish will help lure it in.

Keep in mind that once you have caught the skunk, you will need a way to dispose of it. Make sure you have this all planned out before trapping.

Once the skunk is trapped, use a tarp to approach the trap and then wrap the tarp around the trap

for transportation. I would suggest not transporting it in the back of an SUV. Wear gloves when handling the trap as skunks can carry rabies and other diseases.

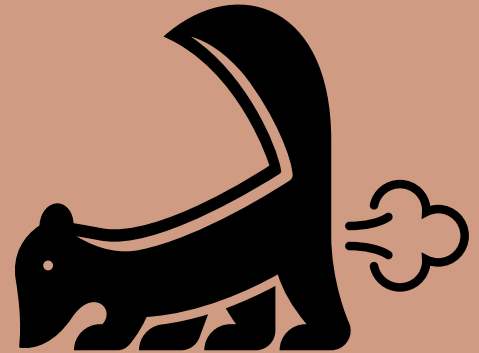
Next, take the skunk to a predetermined area to either dispatch it or release it. Select a public ground location at least 10 miles from any homes so you don't create a problem for someone else. As tempting as it may be to release it at the home of your nemesis, this may come back to haunt you.

Skunks as pets

The other option is to keep the trapped skunk as a pet. Skunks can be de-scented and even litterbox trained. (No, I do not know this from experience.) In Wyoming you do not need a permit to have one as a pet. But, like most wildlife, skunks really don't make good pets.

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Rex Lockman has yet to be sprayed by a skunk, but he has heard plenty of smelly stories about others' misfortunes. He is the wildlife and range specialist for Laramie County Conservation District and can be contacted at rlockman@lccdnet.org.

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How do I get the stink off?

If you do happen to get sprayed, here is the best recommended cure to get the stink out.

Pour 2 to 4 cups of baking soda into a bathtub filled with hot water. Soak in a baking-soda bath for 15 to 20 minutes.

Rinse to remove the residue from your skin.

If your pet is sprayed by a skunk...

The American Kennel Club recommends the following.

1. Mix ¼ cup of baking soda, 1-2 teaspoons of mild dishwashing detergent (such as Ivory Snow), and 1 quart of 3% hydrogen peroxide solution in a bucket. Use immediately.
2. Work the foaming mixture well into the coat.
3. Leave on for five minutes.
4. Rinse with warm water.
5. Follow with dog shampoo if desired.



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