

SKUNKS

in Contra Costa County



CONTRA COSTA
**MOSQUITO
& VECTOR
CONTROL**
DISTRICT



ABOUT THE CONTRA COSTA MOSQUITO AND VECTOR CONTROL DISTRICT'S SKUNK PROGRAM

The District provides inspections and assistance to reduce the likelihood that humans come in contact with skunks because they are a vector of rabies. Upon the first visit, the technician will inspect the property to determine if a skunk has taken up residence.

The District's skunk program is designed to reduce the risk of rabies transmission to Contra Costa County residents. The risk increases when skunks establish a den in close proximity to residents.

When skunks are not in close proximity to humans, the risk of rabies transmission can decrease, while skunks can be beneficial to the environment. Skunks are a natural predator of rodents and they will consume other garden pests including beetles, crickets and grubs.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Two types of skunks are found in California. The striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) is by far the most common in Contra Costa County. The striped skunk is about the size of a house cat (about four to 10 pounds). It has long black fur with two broad white stripes down its back. The head is triangular and the tail is large and bushy. The spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*) is a smaller animal and is uncommon in our county.

Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)



Front



Hind

2.5 inches

Spotted Skunk (*Spilogale putorius*)



Front



Hind

2 inches

INSPECTION

The Contra Costa Mosquito and Vector Control District (the District) provides inspections and assistance to reduce the likelihood that humans come in contact with skunks because they are a vector of rabies. Upon the first visit, the technician will inspect the property to determine if a skunk has taken up residence.

When skunks are not in close proximity to humans, the risk of rabies transmission can decrease. Skunks can be beneficial to the environment, and are a natural predator of rodents. They will consume other garden pests including beetles, crickets, and grubs.

**To request a skunk inspection
call (925) 771-6186**

ODOR REMOVAL

If your pet gets sprayed by a skunk, visit your local pet supply store for a neutralizer to remove the odor. For more information please visit: ipm.ucanr.edu/legacy_assets/pdf/pestnotes/pnskunks.pdf

EXCLUSION METHODS

EXCLUSION (Exterior)

- Replace or reinforce vent screens around home.
- Secure outside crawl space doors near ground level.
- Install ½ inch galvanized hardware cloth around decks, sheds, and home foundations.
- Store firewood 18 inches above ground.
- Prevent skunks from entering compost piles.
- Keep all pet doors secure at night or evening hours.
- Thin or remove dense vegetation.
- Keep debris piles clear so skunks can't burrow beneath and establish dens.



A hole beneath foundation is evidence of a skunk burrow



*Damaged or missing vent screen provides skunks access under a home***

FOOD

- Keep garbage cans tightly secured leaving no exposed garbage.
- Discontinue or remove bird feeders on ground level and remove excess spillage.
- Remove all fruit off the ground when in season.
- Treat lawn areas to eliminate grubs.
- Store animal feed in secure metal containers or bins.
- Secure base of birdhouses or coops using sheet metal or ½ inch galvanized hardware cloth.
- Remove pet food and water dishes.

** Photo used with permission courtesy of Humane Wildlife Control

EXCLUSION METHODS

To prevent skunks from sharing your residence, make sure there are no animals trapped inside and then seal up entry holes in and under buildings and decks.

When you are sure no animals are trapped inside, construct an L-shaped screen around patios, decks, sheds, raised cement walkways, and underneath houses.

For screening above ground, use concrete screw anchors with washers. The anchors should be $\frac{3}{16}$ inch in diameter and $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch in length or longer if needed to attach galvanized hardware cloth to foundation. Half inch galvanized hardware cloth should extend away from the foundation a minimum of 3 to 5 feet. Use galvanized garden stakes to secure galvanized hardware cloth to the ground.



L-Shaped screen application around foundation**



Concrete screw anchors



Galvanized garden stakes



Above ground screening using concrete screw anchors and galvanized garden stakes

** Photo used with permission courtesy of Humane Wildlife Control

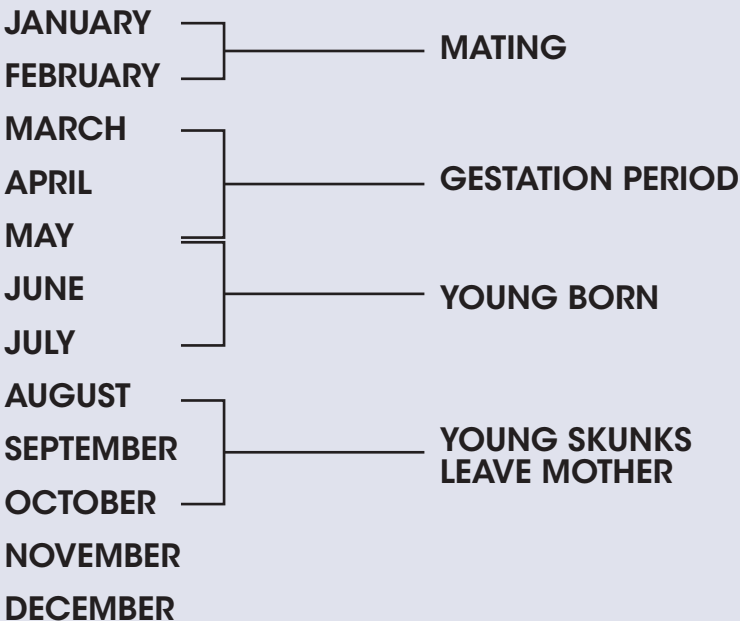
SKUNK BIOLOGY

Skunks are mammals. They are best known for their ability to spray a strong musk which they use as a defense mechanism. This musk is expelled from two scent glands at the rear of the skunk's body. They can spray several times with an accuracy of 10 to 12 feet.

Skunks mate in January and February. Males are quite aggressive when competing for females. Bred females will attack males attempting to mate with them. This may cause the skunks to spray. The gestation period is approximately nine weeks. During this time, the female stays in a sheltered area, in a den she's made. Occasionally, she will go out for food. Several females may den together in the winter, but the males are usually solitary.

Young are born around June. A female gives birth to about six to 10 young and will produce only one litter per year. The young skunks stay with their mother learning how to hunt for food, usually going out on their own by mid to late summer.

SKUNK LIFE CYCLE



RABIES

Skunks can carry rabies. Rabies is a viral disease that attacks the central nervous system and may be fatal in mammals, including humans and domestic animals. It is most often transmitted through the bite of an infected animal. Rabies is usually fatal after the onset of symptoms.

Early symptoms of rabies may include pain or numbness at the bite site, fever, sore throat, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and lethargy. Symptoms progress rapidly to include paralysis, throat spasms, delirium, hallucinations, coma, and finally death.

IF YOU ARE BITTEN BY A SKUNK OR OTHER WILD ANIMAL, CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY.

SIGNS OF RABID ANIMALS

Most people think rabid animals are easily noticed because of excessive drooling and foaming at the mouth. In fact, these symptoms may only appear in the late stages of infection, or not at all.

A better way to recognize a rabid animal is to be aware of unusual or abnormal behavior, staggering, restlessness, aggressiveness, change in tone of bark or growl, or appearance of choking.

Wild animals sometime lose their fear of humans and appear friendly, or passive animals may become fierce and aggressive. It is always best to stay away from wild animals, and to be careful of pets that you do not know.

The risk of rabies increases when skunks are in close proximity to humans. The District's skunk program is a rabies risk reduction program that is designed to reduce the risk of rabies transmission to Contra Costa County residents by providing an inspection and assistance to decrease the chance a skunk will take up residence on private property.

OTHER WILDLIFE

In addition to skunks, other wildlife is prevalent throughout Contra Costa County. While the District does not provide services for raccoons, opossums or squirrels, the chart below compares these animals' common characteristics.

SKUNKS



- Triangular-shaped head and moderately elongated body with short, muscular legs and long, sharp non-retractable claws
- About the size of an adult house cat, with mostly black fur with white on top of head and neck
- Primarily active at dawn, dusk, and at night, but can be active during the daytime, particularly in human-use areas
- Use abandoned burrows dug by ground squirrels, foxes, or coyotes or use brush piles, hollow logs, and culverts for shelter
- In urban settings, den under decks, porches, or beneath buildings
- Have an excellent sense of smell and good hearing, but they have very poor vision

RACCOONS



OPOSSUMS



GROUND SQUIRRELS



For more information on raccoons, opossums and squirrels, contact California Department of Fish & Wildlife <https://wildlife.ca.gov> or University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program <http://IPM.UCANR.edu>

ABOUT CONTRA COSTA MOSQUITO & VECTOR CONTROL DISTRICT

Protecting Public Health Since 1927

Early in the 1900s, Northern California suffered through epidemics of encephalitis and malaria, and severe outbreaks of saltwater mosquitoes. At times, parts of Contra Costa County were considered uninhabitable resulting in the closure of waterfront areas and schools during peak mosquito seasons. Recreational areas were abandoned and Realtors® had trouble selling homes. The general economy suffered. As a result, residents established the Contra Costa Mosquito Abatement District which began service in 1927.

Today, the Contra Costa Mosquito and Vector Control District continues to protect public health with environmentally sound techniques, reliable and efficient services, as well as programs to combat emerging diseases, all while preserving and/or enhancing the environment.

Contra Costa Mosquito & Vector Control District Services for Contra Costa County Residents

MOSQUITOES

Inspection and control including placement of **MOSQUITOFISH** in residential water features

YELLOWJACKETS

Ground-nesting only

BEES

Inspection and education

TICKS

Tick identification

RATS AND MICE

Inspection and advice

SKUNKS

Inspection and assistance

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Literature and presentations

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