

Skunks as Pets

History and Biology: Captive bred skunks make wonderful pets. They range from 6 – 12 pounds with a life span of 7-10 years. **Pet skunks must come from a United States Department of Agriculture rabies free breeding facility.** These are scattered throughout the Midwest. Litters are usually born once a year and skunks come descented. **It is illegal to take a skunk from the wild, descent it and keep it as a pet.**

Pet skunks come in a variety of colors and patterns which include striped or spotted. Colors include black and white, champagne and white, chocolate and white, smoke and albino.

In the wild, adult skunks are solitary unless raising young. They are nocturnal and will forage for 7-8 miles every night to find food. Skunks have multiple burrows scattered throughout a given area and will share their burrows with different species of animals. In captivity, skunks are prone to obesity due to the lack of foraging for food.

Housing:

- If possible, skunks should not be caged. If a cage must be used, it should be no smaller than 5 x 6 foot. A solid bottom should be used. Large dog crates or kennels can be used. Skunks do better if housed in a room or have access to part of the house. Baby gates can be used to limit their access to certain areas.
- **Skunks can be litter box trained.** Most prefer low-sided boxes as they are easier to step into. Use paper pelleted litter and avoid clay-based litter, cedar or pine.
- When young, skunks may chew and dig on furniture and carpets. They may also chew on rubber toys, electrical cords, shoes or house plants. When allowed to roam, their environment must be hazard free.

Diet:

- Clean, fresh water should always be available. Providing water in a water bottle with a ball valve is possible, although using a ceramic bowl is also appropriate. The bottles should be cleaned regularly. Brushes are available at most pet stores to clean water bottles. Tap water or filtered water may be used. Well water should be avoided unless it is potable for human consumption.
- **Skunks are omnivores, eating both vegetables and fruits, as well as lean protein.** As they are prone to obesity, it is best to feed a low-fat dog food with a fat content of no higher than 7 percent. Vegetables offered should be of the leafy green variety. Starchy vegetables and fruit should be minimized. If fruit is fed, better choices include blackberries, raspberries, papaya and apple.

- Appropriate protein sources include insect based proteins such as earthworms or silkworms. Some skunks will not eat insects. Hard-boiled eggs (with shell), fat-free yogurt, cottage cheese or tofu are possibilities.

Veterinary Care:

- Spaying and neutering skunks is recommended. Spaying females will reduce the risk of uterine disease and spaying or neutering will eliminate any remaining musky odor.
- **Skunks do require vaccination. Skunks should be vaccinated for canine distemper at the ages of 8, 11 and 14 weeks of age. This vaccine should be boosted yearly.** No rabies vaccine is approved for skunks, and if household pets, their risk of contracting rabies is low. Skunks are also susceptible to infectious canine hepatitis and leptospirosis. Vaccinating for these diseases are discretionary and none are approved for use in skunks.
- Skunks have very long toenails which are used to dig and rip open logs and branches to look for grubs. In captivity, the toenails can grow to be very long. Toenails should be trimmed every month.
- Every year, skunks should have comprehensive bloodwork and fecal exams. **Skunks carry a type of roundworm which is transmittable to people and other animals.** They should be on a routine deworming program.
- Skunks should have a dentistry every year to check for broken or infected teeth and to have them cleaned.
- Finding a good veterinarian is recommended. It is very important to call and see if a veterinarian is comfortable seeing a pet skunk. Pet skunks should be examined every six months.