

Nature Adventures Module: Skunks!

(Highlighted words are found in the Glossary List)

Terri: Sniff...What's that smell? Oh no! Don't tell me!

Todd: Yup, the dog got sprayed by a skunk again, I was going to tell you, but I figured you would figure it out soon enough.

Terri: It doesn't take long for the scent of a skunk to fill a room after something has been sprayed by one.

Todd: Skunks are legendary for their powerful predator deterrent, a hard to remove, horrible smelling spray. A skunk's spray is an oily liquid produced by glands under its large tail. To employ this scent bomb, a skunk turns around and blasts its foe with a foul mist that can travel as far as ten feet.

Terri: Although skunk spray causes no real damage to its victims, it sure makes them uncomfortable. It can linger for many days and defy attempts to remove it.

Todd: As a **defensive technique**, the spray is very effective. Skunks present otherwise easy prey for larger animals, but often times they leave something behind to remember them by.

Terri: There are 4 different kinds of skunks in North America. Most are housecat-sized and around 10 pounds and 24" long including their tail and appear in a variety of striped, spotted, and swirled patterns—but all are a vivid black and white that makes them easily identifiable and may alert predators to their pungent potential.

Todd: Skunks are a member of the weasel family. Spotted skunks are smaller, and more weasel-like in appearance. They have white spots, and broken white stripes in a dense black fur. Spotted and striped skunks are found throughout the Great Plains. Nearly all skunks live in the Americas, except for the Asian stink badgers that have recently been added to the skunk family.

Terri: Skunks are most active during the late evening and early hours of the night, but are active during the day as well. Skunks are opportunistic eaters with a varied diet. They often forage for food at night, eating fruit and plants, insects, larvae, worms, eggs, reptiles, small mammals, and even fish.

Todd: As with many of the things and places that were new to them, early settlers adopted, and in this case adapted, the name the Native Americans had already given this strange animal. The Algonquian Indian name "seganku," meaning "one who squirts," became the English word "skunk."