SKUNKS
IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

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.

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.

REV: 01/2019
GENERAL INFORMATION

If you smell a skunk, see a skunk passing through your yard or your pet has been sprayed by a skunk while on your property, please note these occurrences alone do not meet the District’s criteria and District employees will not trap nor remove a skunk from your property.

Our District office is closed on weekends and the holidays noted on page 14 of this brochure.

* Photos used with permission courtesy of Kim Cabrera
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.

To request a skunk inspection call (925) 771-6190.

If trapping is necessary, the technician will provide guidelines and policies set forth by the California Fish and Wildlife code to help capture the target skunk.

It is a violation of California Fish and Wildlife Codes* and the California Code of Regulations* to:

1. Transport wild animals.
2. Fail to check your skunk trap DAILY.
3. Relocate the skunk trap off your property.

*(Sections 2118, 4004, 4005, 4150, California Fish and Wildlife Code; and Section 671, Title 14, California Code of Regulations)

The District will not remove skunks from traps that have not been previously approved or that are covered by tarps, plastic, blankets, rugs, or any other material.

Reasons for discontinuation of service:

• 10 – 12 days have passed with no skunk in the trap
• Failure to call the District to request animal removal or non-target animal release by the 7:00 a.m. deadline
• Not monitoring the trap daily for the presence of non-target animals
TRAP DESIGN AND FUNCTION

Setting Instructions:

1. Turn the small locking plate and slide the door off.

2. Bait the trap with anything dry, such as cat or dog kibble, cereal, marshmallows, crackers, potato chips, etc.

3. Shake food to the back end of the trap. **DO NOT LEAVE FOOD IN THE MIDDLE OR OUTSIDE THE FRONT ENTRANCE TO THE TRAP.**

4. Slide the exposed one-inch pin back on top of the cylinder, place slide door back on leaving it on a slight angle to rest on the edge of the cylinder. **DO NOT REST SLIDE DOOR ON PIN.**

5. The trapped animal will trigger the pan rod from inside which will push the door off the edge of the cylinder trap to close and lock. **BE SURE THE HEX NUT SIDE OF THE SLIDE DOOR FACES OUT SO THAT THE DOOR SLIDES DOWN COMPLETELY.**

This cylinder trap is used to capture skunks alive and unharmed. The slide door is at one end and a locked plate is at the other end. Once the door has dropped to lock in place, the target animal is trapped.

Please call our District before the 7 a.m. deadline so we can remove the skunk or release a non-target animal that business day. Do not attempt to verify that there is an animal in the trap once the door is down.
USING A TRAP

DO NOT place traps under home crawl spaces, decks, sheds, or any structure.

- Trap must be accessible to the District employee.
- Trap must be checked to see if the trap door is closed by the 7 a.m. deadline daily—Please do not open the door to the trap if it closed.
- Trap must not be set on Fridays or Saturdays. Trap must not be set on Sundays if the next day is a holiday as the District will be closed and unable to retrieve the animal.
- Trap must remain ON property where it was originally dropped off.
- Trap must only be placed on locations determined by District technician.
- Trap must not be used to trap animals other than skunks.

Keep children, members of the public, and pets away from the trap.

During hot weather, trickle water into the trap using a garden hose for the animal to drink.

For skunk removal or to verify that an animal has been trapped, please call (925) 771-6192 by 7:00 a.m. District employees will not respond on weekends or holidays.

If the skunk has not triggered the trap by the 7:00 a.m. deadline, close the trap door immediately for the day. The trap should not be set during daylight hours. Set the trap only at dusk except for Fridays and Saturdays when the District is closed.
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 heavy vegetation or low growing ground cover.

• Keep debris piles clear so skunks can’t burrow beneath and establish dens.

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 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.

** 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.
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 preventable through routine vaccinations, but is usually fatal after the onset of symptoms.

Early symptoms of rabies may include pain or numbness at the bite sight, 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 IT IS VITAL THAT YOU GET MEDICAL ATTENTION 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.
ODOR REMOVAL

If your pet gets sprayed by a skunk, visit your local pet supply for a neutralizer or try this formula to remove the odor:

Take one quart of three percent hydrogen peroxide (available at pharmacies); ¼ cup baking soda; and one teaspoon liquid soap. Mix together and wash the skunk-sprayed animal, keeping the mixture out of its eyes, nose, and mouth. Rinse with tap water.

**DO NOT TRY TO BOTTLE OR STORE THIS SOLUTION.**
The mixture causes a minor chemical reaction and expanding gases could “explode” if confined to a bottle.
**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. More information can be found at: [https://www.contracostamosquito.com/PDF/resources.pdf](https://www.contracostamosquito.com/PDF/resources.pdf)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKUNKS</th>
<th>Raccoons</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Triangular-shaped head and moderately elongated body with</td>
<td>• Medium-sized mammal, 12-35 pounds and 20-40 inches long</td>
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<tr>
<td>short, muscular legs and long, sharp non-retractable claws</td>
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<tr>
<td>• About the size of an adult house cat, with mostly black fur with</td>
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<tr>
<td>white on top of head and neck</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Primarily active at dawn, dusk, and at night, but can be active</td>
<td>• Mostly active at nighttime and may go undetected</td>
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<td>during the daytime, particularly in human-use areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use abandoned burrows dug by ground squirrels, foxes, or coyotes or</td>
<td>• Den in hollow trees, ground burrows, brush piles, or rock crevices</td>
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<tr>
<td>use brush piles, hollow logs, and culverts for shelter</td>
<td>• Adapt well to urban and suburban environments where they often den in</td>
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<tr>
<td>• In urban settings, den under decks, porches, or beneath buildings</td>
<td>backyards</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Have an excellent sense of smell and good hearing, but they have</td>
<td>• Females can cause considerable damage of a house while in search of</td>
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<tr>
<td>very poor vision</td>
<td>nesting site</td>
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<td><strong>• Animal track photos used with permission courtesy of Kim Cabrera</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opossums</td>
<td>Ground Squirrel</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Opossum" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Ground Squirrel" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>• House cat-sized marsupials (pouched mammals), about two to three feet long including the tail, and weigh up to 15 pounds and have a prehensile tail which is used for balance</td>
<td>• Generally gray and light brown fur, semi-bushy tail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Body and tail length: 14-20 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Solitary and nocturnal</td>
<td>• Active during the day, ground squirrels can hibernate during winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Non-aggressive and will hiss and show teeth if provoked</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prefer to live near streams or wetlands</td>
<td>• Nest in burrows underground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In urban areas, may den under steps, porches, decks, garden sheds, and under houses</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Will occasionally enter homes through pet door</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Poor eyesight and hearing, rely on sense of smell to hunt</td>
<td>• Keen eyesight, can see above or beside them without moving head</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information on raccoons, opossums and squirrels, contact California Department of Fish & Wildlife [https://wildlife.ca.gov](https://wildlife.ca.gov) or University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program [http://IPM.UCANR.edu](http://IPM.UCANR.edu)
Please **DO NOT SET YOUR SKUNK TRAP** on Fridays or Saturdays, or the night before the following holidays:

**JANUARY**
- New Year’s Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

**FEBRUARY**
- Presidents Day

**MARCH**
- Cesar Chavez Day

**MAY**
- Memorial Day

**JULY**
- Independence Day

**SEPTEMBER**
- Labor Day

**NOVEMBER**
- Veterans Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Friday after Thanksgiving

**DECEMBER**
- Christmas Day

Please check your calender as the dates of some holidays vary from year to year.
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.