



FAST FACTS

NAME: Striped skunk

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Mephitis mephitis*

AVERAGE WEIGHT: 3.25 kg

AVERAGE LENGTH: 57.5 to 80 cm

AVERAGE LIFESPAN: Up to 3 years in the wild and up to 15 years in captivity

DID YOU KNOW?

The striped skunk seems to be aware of the repulsiveness of its own odor – it will not spray in confined spaces and or in their own dens.

PHYSIOLOGY

The striped skunk has thick, sleek black fur and a white stripe that splits into two at the shoulders and continues along each side of the back to the base of the tail. While the tail is mostly black, the stripe may extend down, with a patch of white at the tip. On its small head, another stripe extends from the top of its face down to the tip of its nose.

Attached to its semi-webbed toes, it has long straight claws that help it rip apart trees and shrubs for food and help it dig dens for shelter.

With small, short legs, the skunk is very slow. Because they can't out-run predators, they rely on their scent glands for security. These glands, which are about the size of a grape, secrete a foul-smelling, oily, yellow musk. The spray of a skunk can reach up to six meters and the foul odor is strong enough to be carried almost one kilometre by the wind.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

The skunk prefers open areas of mixed forests and grasslands and usually lives in the abandoned dens of other animals, such as woodchucks and foxes. They also live under porches and in cellars, stumps, rock piles and refuse heaps and very rarely dig their own dens.

To make a nest, the skunk will line an area of its den with leaves, which it gathers by putting under its body and shuffle to the den. The striped skunk is nocturnal. When they come out of their den at night, they will stay close to home. These skunks only venture about 800 metres from home, yet they can walk approximately two kilometers in one night! During breeding season males take even larger risks and many travel up to eight kilometres at night.

Over the summer the skunk eats so much that by the fall, they're insulated with a warm layer of fat. By November or December these little animals select a deep den to sleep the winter away. In some parts of Canada skunks will awaken as early as late February to begin breeding. The babies are born in May and there are typically four to six young in a litter. Newborns are furless at birth, but after just 13 days they have a thick, glossy coat.

RANGE

The striped skunk can be found from Central Mexico to Nunavut and the Northwest Territories and across the Maritimes to West-Central British Columbia.