



Oregon Sea Grant Extension  
Sustainable Tourism &  
Outdoor Recreation Program

# Interpretative Fact Sheet Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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# Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)

 [tourism.oregonstate.edu/striped-skunk-mephitis-mephitis/](https://tourism.oregonstate.edu/striped-skunk-mephitis-mephitis/)

By colliiek2

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*What kills a skunk is the publicity it gives itself.*

**Abraham Lincoln**

A skunk's publicity, as referenced above, would be its chemical defense system. All skunks have a highly developed, musk-filled scent glands (even the babies have developed the glands by day eight).

The pungent musk can be sprayed from two special glands near the skunk's anus up to 10 feet away about five times before running out of fluid. It takes about ten days for the musk to be fully regenerated.

## Predators

Ernest Thompson Seton (one of the founders of the Boy Scouts of America) described the oily, yellow-colored musk as a perfume with the essence of garlic, burning sulfur and sewer gas "magnified a thousand times."

As such, the skunk has few natural predators which include cougars, coyotes, bobcats, badgers, foxes, and predatory bird such as eagles and owls. Hunting a skunk, and the associated risks, make this a 'starvation' choice rather than a normal act.

Their black and white coloring makes skunks highly visible during the day and fairly invisible at night when they are most active. The coloring may not be for camouflage but as a warning advertisement for other animals. This strategy is called 'aposematism' and is used by many insects, birds, and other mammals.

## Except for Human Predators

Humans trapped and captively bred skunk for their fur and sometimes as pets. At one time skunk fur was highly sought after. Compared to other animals the fur is more durable and has a rich luster.

Skunk furs were the second most harvested animals after the muskrat. In the late 1890s, skunk farming became popular as a way to meet foreign trade demands. Captive selective breeding and selecting is fairly simple compared to other fur animals. There was high demands for blacker pelts. Skunk farming did not generate a great deal of revenue.

## **A pet or meal?**

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Some folks adopted skunks as pets and used them to rid barns of mice and rats. Skunks are highly adaptable to human-conditions and are easy to tame compared to other animals.

Skunk meat was eaten by trappers and indigenous people, and sought after by Chinese immigrants not only for the meat but some medical properties. The meat has been described as “white, tender, sweet and more delicate than chicken.” Maybe that is where the phrase “tastes like chicken” came from. You think?

## **Prey**

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Striped skunks frequently consume insects and their most favorite insect is the yellow jacket. Skunks are immune to the yellow jacket venom and will dig up their underground nest and eat the bees as they escape.

In the winter, skunks supplement their diet with mice, voles, and other small mammals. They will also feed on eggs and chicks of ground-nesting birds, crabs, and beached fish, and vegetable matter (such as fruit, corn, and nightshade vegetables).

## **Home, Stinky, Home**

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Skunks make their homes in the ground, under buildings, and in hollow logs and often den communally. They will inhabit unused dens from other animals. They typically occupy dens during late fall, winter, and early spring for rearing kits.

## **REFERENCE:**

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