

Skunked – Dave deCalesta – Reprinted from 6/07 KLA Newsletter

Everyone knows when a skunk is around: the smell! There are other subtle little hints of skunk presence: those odd, cone-shaped holes in the yard (skunks digging for earthworms and grubs), or the cat food that keeps turning up missing on the stoop overnight. A less subtle hint is when our dogs get sprayed, or worse, if we get a dose.

What to do about skunks? As with all other wildlife in the pest context, prevention is the cheapest and easiest. Skunks like to hole up in protected spots, like behind the lattice under decks and porches, under low-lying decks, in crawl spaces, and in wood piles. Add the free food when we feed our dogs and cats outdoors and you've got skunk heaven.

Stop feeding the pets outdoors. Make sure that the lattice or other screening for exposed areas under porches is tight to the ground and with no gaps a skunk might get under or around. Close up openings to crawl spaces and make sure the foundation is tight to the ground and rest of the house. Make sure firewood is stacked tightly with no inviting cavities or holes.

In spite of these preventive measures, skunks still wander by and take up temporary residence, or perhaps our skunk-proofing isn't up to the mark. What next? Skunks are incredibly easy to catch in live traps. These are the rectangular wire boxes sold in nearly every hardware store, including the larger chains. Traps come with directions: however for those without, a quick lesson.

Most traps have an opening (flat, rectangular metal door) at each end. Setting the trap involves manipulating rods on one side of the trap: pushing the rods downwards allows them to be positioned under a lever attached to a square metal pan inside the middle of the trap. When the rods are positioned right, the pan is level, and the doors on both ends of the trap are held in the open position. Once you've got the hang of setting the trap, set it

so that only one door is open. Place an opened can of wet cat food just behind the door that is closed. Place the set trap along a wall close to the opening where the skunk is getting under the house, or near the house in shrubbery. Tie a long rope to the trap.



To get the food, the skunk has to walk over the pan, making it tilt and release the rod that holds the door open and presto! You've caught a skunk. Now what?

Skunks are very docile and will not spray you unless you treat them roughly. Pull the trap away from the house or shrubbery with the attached rope. Then hold up a small tarp in front of you and slowly walk over and gently drape the tarp over the trap. You can then pick up the trap by grabbing the handle (on top, under the tarp) and place it in the trunk of your car, or bed of your truck. Drive **at least 5 miles away, and not near any homes**, take out skunk and trap, place trap on its side, gently open one of the doors, and the skunk will walk out and away.

What if you or dog (or cat) get sprayed? In a plastic bottle, mix:

- 1 quart 3% hydrogen peroxide,
- ¼ cup baking soda
- 1 teaspoon liquid dishwasher soap

Scrub/soak sprayed dog, or clothing vigorously with the mix, rinse with warm water, and all is well, and odor free. This stuff works.

9/07

Skunk Advice Revisited: In the last issue of the Keuka Lake Association, I described how to live trap and release skunks that were a nuisance around the house. Following that advice could get you afoul of the law because I did not mention that:

- Traps must be **marked** with the trapper's name and address.
- Traps must be **checked** at least once every 24 hours and animals promptly removed.
- Trappers must get written **permission** from all neighbors, including schools and churches, within 100 feet.
- Potential rabies carriers (foxes, skunks, raccoons, opossums) must not be transported by anyone other than a DEC **licensed nuisance wildlife** agent, must be humanely euthanized as per law, and the remains disposed of according to law.
- **Cats** caught accidentally by someone trying to catch a skunk or other animals must be dealt with according to New York State animal laws and either immediately released on site, immediately turned over to a shelter or animal control personnel for reclaim by an owner, or, if injured, taken for care by a licensed veterinarian.

So, if you're still interested in the live trapping route, perhaps a professional trapper is the best bet: the NY DEC maintains lists of trappers, call: 607-652-7367. If you still go ahead and trap the skunk, you'll need to humanely euthanize the critter, and I've been unable to get a definition of "humane euthanization."