

ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL

L-1901

CONTROLLING SKUNK DAMAGE

Many people consider skunks odorous, obnoxious pests that should be avoided at all costs and even eliminated on sight. However, these animals generally are beneficial because of their grub, insect, and rodent control capabilities. They range throughout the United States and are considered important furbearers in many states.

Skunks are nocturnal, preferring to hunt at night for grubs, insects, small rodents, carrion, fruit, berries, unripened corn, mushrooms and other food items. Skunks like poultry and eggs and, when circumstances permit, raid chicken houses and poultry yards. In urban areas, they feed on pet food, garbage, fruit that has fallen from trees and garden vegetables. Skunks use any sheltered place as a den including abandoned armadillo burrows, predator dens, under houses, unused buildings, barns and even attics of buildings.

Disease Transmission

Skunks are a primary source of rabies in Texas. The Texas Department of Health reports that skunks, in recent years, have accounted for more than 60 percent of all known rabid animals. Human

and domestic pet contact with skunks should be avoided. If it is necessary to handle a skunk, wear impermeable rubber or plastic gloves.

Damage

Skunks become a problem when their feeding and burrowing activities conflict with man's interests. In urban areas, skunks damage gardens and lawns as well as expose humans and pets to several transmittable diseases, especially rabies. In rural areas, skunks can cause losses to poultry operations, expose livestock to disease and occasionally cause damage to crops.

Skunks can be a nuisance because of their odor. All skunks have the ability to discharge a nauseating musk from their anal glands. They are capable of discharging their musk several times with accuracy to about 10 feet. Confrontation with pets often results with the pet being victimized by the skunk's spray. When skunks take shelter under buildings, their presence is not easily tolerated by occupants of the building.

Control Methods

Because skunks can cause damage and are an important vector of rabies, it is often necessary to control individual members of a population when they are in conflict with man's health and economic interests. Any type of control should include both environmental and mechanical control measures.

Environmental Control

When skunks are living or rearing young under buildings, attempts to destroy them may result in the release of their noxious scent. Before attempting removal, sprinkle a liberal amount of flour or a similar substance in and around the entrance. After dark, check for tracks which indicate whether the animals have left to forage for food, which openings they used as exits and the number of skunks involv-

