A Skunk By Any Name Still Smells

Mention a skunk and plenty of images arise, the most potent being the lingering odor that seems to accompany the critter wherever it goes.

Actually, skunks only release their powerful scent when disturbed, and they give plenty of warnings. If a skunk begins to tamp its front legs or turns its back towards you while backing up, then beware. An unpleasant stream of skunk perfume is about to waft your way.

Skunks are related to otter, minks, and weasels, all of which have potent scent glands as well. Skunks, however, have mastered the art of aiming and firing their scent to deter potential predators.

How do you get rid of that smell? The Humane Society of the United States says that “Skunk odor on pets may be neutralized with liberal amounts of vinegar or tomato juice. This will make the odor tolerable - only time will eliminate it.”

Chlorine bleach, ammonia, or commercial products containing neutroleum alpha may be used on inanimate objects. Carbolic soap and water are safe to use on skin. Liberal flushing with cold water will ease the discomfort of skunk spray in the eyes.”

Louisiana is home to two skunk species, the striped skunk (Mephitis) and the eastern spotted skunk (Spilogale putorius). The latter is uncommon in Louisiana and is therefore tracked by the Louisiana Natural Heritage Program. The striped skunk ranges nearly statewide, except extreme southeastern Louisiana.

Spotted skunks den in burrows abandoned by other mammals, under brush piles, in hollow logs or trees, under buildings, or other protected sites. Striped skunks may excavate their own burrows. Skunks are technically carnivores but they eat just about anything; berries, corn, small mammals, carrion, grubs, and insects.

Spotted skunks are slightly smaller than the striped skunk. Both have the same black base fur color with white markings.