



## Striped Skunk

(*Mephitis mephitis*)

Order: Carnivora Family: Mustelidae

**SIZE:** About the size of a house cat. Weight, 5-14 pounds. Males are larger than females.

**DESCRIPTION:** Black with two broad, white stripes on back, meeting on the top of the head or shoulders. Thin, white stripe down center of face. Bushy, black tail often with white tip or fringe. Color may vary from mostly black to mostly white. Stout body, small head and short legs. Long claws for digging. Color pattern serves as a warning to potential enemies.

**LOCOMOTION:** Slowly shuffles or waddles. Does not rely on speed to escape predators.

**DEFENSE:** A skunk will try to retreat from danger, but if threatened it will growl, snarl, click its teeth, or stamp its feet. It will then raise its tail straight up and spray scent 10-15 feet. The mist may reach three times as far and the smell may carry as far as a mile. Fluid in the eyes causes intense pain and a fleeting loss of vision. The anal glands of a skunk hold about one tablespoon of a thick, oily, yellowish fluid, enough for 5 or 6 jets of spray.

**HABITS:** Found in deserts, suburbs, plains, woodlands and near rivers. Solitary and primarily nocturnal. They do not hibernate, but may become temporarily dormant in very cold weather.

**DIET:** Omnivorous, they feed on a wide variety of vegetable matter, insects, grubs, small mammals, eggs, and amphibians. Skunks gorge themselves in the fall to fatten up for the lean winter months.

**RANGE:** Most of the United States. Most common of all skunks in the U.S.

**FAMILY LIFE:** Mating occurs from mid-February to mid-April and birth occurs in May and early June. Three to five young are born and weigh about 15-30 grams. They open their eyes after 3 weeks and are weaned at about two months. They remain with their mother until fall, and may join her in the winter den.

**NESTING:** Skunks usually den in a burrow abandoned by another animal, although they may also dig their own den or use a hollow log, crevice or den beneath a porch or building.

**ENEMIES:** The scent of the skunk provides an effective defense against most natural enemies. The Great Horned Owl seems relatively unaffected by the scent and often preys upon skunks.

### **DID YOU KNOW THAT...?**

- Their scientific name *Mephitis mephitis*, when translated from Latin, means "Noxious gas Noxious gas."
- Skunks seem to be aware of their own odor, and therefore avoid spraying in confined spaces.
- Skunks are beneficial to mankind, primarily by eating many home and farm pests. Skunks proved such an efficient enemy of the hop grub in New York State that legislation was passed to protect skunks.

## **Track**

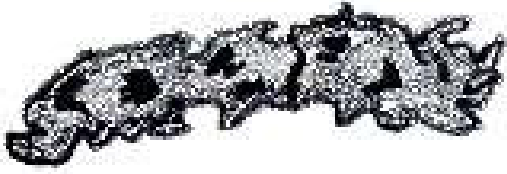
Front 1 3/4 inches

Hind 1 7/8 inches

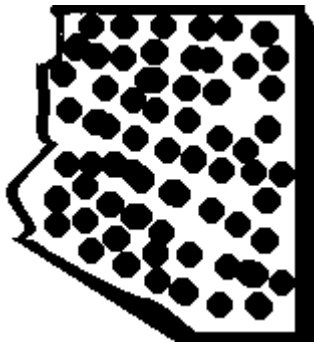


**Front**

**Hind**



## Scat



## Range

Throughout the United States,  
Southwestern Canada,  
to Southern Mexico.