



**New Mexico  
Wildlife Center**

## *Skunks in the basement*

Skunks used to be grouped with the family Mustelidae, weasels and badgers and such. In 1997 they were given their own classification, Mephitidae. There are 12 different species of skunks. The striped skunk (*Mephitis Mephitis*) is the predominate skunk in New Mexico.

Striped skunks are between 20 and 30 inches long and weigh between 6 and 10 pounds when adult sized. They are excellent diggers, poor climbers and generally rather slow moving. Striped skunks generally have litters of about five babies sometime between late April and early June. They are generally nocturnal and omnivorous, eating many rodents. Cars and great horned owls pose the greatest threats to skunks.

In the wild skunks can have a territory of more than 30 acres and are almost always found within two miles of a water source. They like to den in warm, dark, and defensible places. Basements and crawl spaces qualify.

Skunks are adaptable and have learned to make use of human occupied areas. The best way to keep skunks from human habitations is to limit opportunities for them.

- Do not leave pet food outside
- Secure garbage cans
- Close all access to crawl spaces, attics or sheds
- Pick up fruit from under trees
- Remove outdoor sources of water if you can

If a skunk has taken up residence in or under a building try the following:

- If you are uncertain of the entrance/exit hole, cover all suspected areas with loose dirt, the Skunk will dig it out at night.
- When entrance is found, wait until after dark, when skunk has left for a night of foraging and block the entrance. Be sure there are no young left behind.

You can encourage skunks to move on by making their dens less habitable by placing lights in the denning sites or playing music.

Relocation is no solution. If your property is suitable for skunks and you do nothing to change it, new skunks will move in. Any relocated animal will be particularly vulnerable when released to a new territory. It does not know where to locate food, good shelter or water.