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Michigan State University Extension-Oakland County

Controlling Skunks, Raccoons, Opossums



Although these familiar animals are dissimilar in appearance and classification, they all invade homes and other buildings, dig up lawns, damage vegetable crops, and raid chicken coops and beehives. Control methods are the same for each, but with extra precautions for skunks.

Exclusion

When one of these animals takes up residence in an attic, under the crawl space of a home, underneath the floor of a barn or garage, or some portion of a building, the only effective control method is to deny entrance by making the necessary repairs, additions, or improvements. It is important, however, to exclude the animals as soon as they are noticed, because it is not uncommon for them to raise young in human dwellings. Extra efforts must be made to remove the young physically before starting repairs, to keep from sealing them in. Otherwise the owner must wait until the young are old enough to leave on their own.

It is imperative that any ground level repairs made to exclude these animals extend at least 12 inches into the ground and have an L-shaped bottom, to prevent reentry by digging. Skunks are especially adept at digging under repairs, which do not extend into the ground.

Population Reduction

Trapping

A permit, issued by the local DNR field office, is required to trap these nuisance animals. A license is not required. Call your local Michigan Department of Natural Resources for additional details. The district office for Oakland County is in Southfield. Their telephone number is (248) 359-9040. They will often give verbal permits over the phone.

Where exclusion of these animals is not possible, or where they are damaging crops or livestock, the only practical alternative is trapping. However, if animals have been allowed to live in an occupied dwelling for any length of time, trapping may be undesirable, as it could leave dependent young within the dwelling.

Live Trapping

All of these animals are easy to catch in live traps. Live traps can be made or are available commercially. Traps should be baited with an odorous material, such as sardines, dog food, bacon or small pieces of paper or wood soaked in used cooking oil or grease.

Any live trap used for raccoons must be devised so that the raccoons cannot open the trap door. Raccoons are very adept at opening traps and are sometimes even capable of undoing latches that lock the trap door down, if they can reach the latches with their paws. When live-trapping skunks, it is important to make traps of solid material, such as wood or metal. Wire traps must be

wrapped in burlap, plastic or similar material, so that the skunk cannot see out of the trap once it is caught. The trap, if handled gently, can then be moved with little danger of the skunk spraying.

According to DNR regulations (7/1/97) trapped animals may not be held in captivity or transported to other areas for release unless permission is obtained from the owner or manager of the land. Animals must be immediately killed or released. Again, check with the local DNR field office for current regulations.

Trapped animals may be killed by drowning in a trashcan filled with water.

Pest Control Services

Another option is to hire a firm that specializes in handling nuisance wildlife problems. They will be familiar with laws and regulations that pertain to your situation. They can also dispose of the animal.

Shooting

If damage is being caused by one or two individuals, shooting may be practical. In most areas, the best time to look for these animals is shortly before and after sundown. Either a .22 caliber rifle or shotgun with No. 4 shot is satisfactory for raccoons or opossums. A skunk may not spray if shot through the heart with a solid point .22 caliber long rifle



bullet.

A damage control permit is required to shoot raccoons, skunks, and opossums on the owner's property where damage is occurring. A hunting license is not required under these conditions.

Before discharging a firearm, check local ordinances.

Skunk Odors

Although it is extremely difficult to eliminate skunk odors completely, several substances reduce the odor to unnoticeable levels, unless you closely sniff the material. If the odor is in soil around or beneath the home, the best neutralizing agent is chloride of lime applied to the soil. This material kills plants.

When the odor is on materials, such as cloth, hair or skin, tomato juice or vinegar applied liberally and thoroughly rubbed on the material will greatly reduce the odor.

Inside a house, the only effective treatment is an aerosol mist deodorant. One of the most effective is neutrolem alpha, available from many pest control operators.

Other effective deodorants are isobornyl acetate-based materials. New deodorants are continually appearing on the market and some are reported to reduce skunk odors effectively. Most household deodorants available in supermarkets are not strong enough.

A New Odor Treatment

Chemist, Paul Krebaum of Molex Inc., whose research involves working with thiois (those nasty smelling chemicals typical of degrading proteins and skunk spray) found that the thiois can be changed to non-smelly products by an oxidation process. He became involved with the skunk problem as a result of a colleague and his pet cat. Krebaum knew skunk spray was made of thiois and he suggests using a variation of the formula he used for getting rid of thiois in the lab. The soap

breaks up the oils in the skunk spray and allows the other ingredients in the solution to do their stuff. The solution should be rinsed off the pet with tap water.

The formula he developed is:

- 1 quart of 3% hydrogen peroxide
- 1/4 cup baking soda
- 1 teaspoon liquid soap

Because of the instability of these ingredients, do not pre-mix -- make only as needed. The formulation defies normal marketing techniques as the chemicals become unstable when mixed and release oxygen in such quantity that a container or bottle would be ruptured.

As a result of these marketing/packaging difficulties Krebaum decided to make this bit of information a "free-gift-to-humanity". In October 1993, Chemical and Engineering News published Krebaum's formula.

One person was interested but skeptical and decided to try it before recommending it. By luck he found a road-kill skunk, carefully wrapped it inside two plastic bags and put it in the trunk. Back in the office he made up the solution. The whole time his eyes were watering as he had never been this close to a skunk in his life. He dunked the skunk in the bucket and immediately the smell went away. He was amazed and impressed.

Would you like additional information?

Additional information is available on-line. Please see [MSU Extension-Oakland County's publications](#) as well as the [MSU Extension Bookstore](#) on campus.

Please contact our office (248/858-0880) for assistance.