

April 2008

## Creature Feature Striped Skunk



The Striped Skunk, one of the most familiar North American mammals, lives in all 48 contiguous states. Most people are familiar with a skunk's odor because the oily musk persists for some time after it is released. Skunks try to avoid spraying by offering a black and white warning and a foot stomping display prior to releasing their musk from anal glands near their tail.

Skunks are nocturnal, becoming active at dusk and remaining active throughout the night. They seek shelter in abandoned woodchuck burrows, brush piles, and under buildings. Skunks are opportunistic in their feeding and will eat insects, fruits, small mammals, eggs, and frogs.



Skunks mate in March or April and 4-6 kits weighing less than 2 ounces each (about the weight of a golf ball) are born between two and three months later. When kits are 6 or 7 weeks old they will venture out of their den, lining up behind their mother as she forages.

## Color Codes

"Stay away!" is the clear message skunks send to their predators. The black and white coloring tells everyone that this is one critter you don't want to mess with!



The bright colors of a Monarch Butterfly

send the message 'I taste bad.' If a bird decides to ignore the warning, they will be rewarded with a terrible tasting, stomach turning snack.

Other, non-threatening organisms, take advantage of these color schemes to save themselves. Viceroy butterflies look like Monarchs, but don't have the same offensive taste.

Hover flies are harmless, but their coloring makes



us believe they possess the defenses of bees and wasps.

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