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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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SKUNKS

Skunks are one of the major nuisance pests that are never welcomed around our homes. Besides their extremely obnoxious odors, skunks are the primary carriers of rabies in East Texas. Homeowners may be able to tolerate other types of pesky animals, but not the skunk.

Skunks are primarily nocturnal, preferring to hunt at night for grubs, insects, small rodents, fruit, berries, and other food items. Skunks like poultry and eggs and can be found raiding chicken houses and poultry yards. In urban areas, they will feed on pet food, garbage and garden fruits and vegetables. Skunks are actually considered beneficial since they do help in controlling grubs, insects and rodents.

Skunks quickly become a problem when they establish their residences near our homes, barns or work areas. Skunks may damage gardens and lawns as well as expose humans, pets, horses and other livestock to disease.

All skunks have the ability to discharge a nauseating musk from their anal glands. They can discharge their musk several times with accuracy to about 10 feet. Pets are often sprayed when they confront skunks.

Because skunks can cause damage and are an important vector of disease, it is often necessary to control them when they are in conflict with man. Any type of control should include both environmental and mechanical control.

When skunks are living or rearing young under buildings, attempts to destroy them may result in the release of their noxious scent. Before attempting removal, sprinkle a liberal amount of flour in and around the entrance. After dark, check for tracks to determine which openings they used as exits and the number of skunks involved. When the animals have left, close all possible entrances with sheet metal or hardware cloth to avoid reentry.

Shooting and trapping, including the use of live traps and leghold traps, are some methods that can be used in rural areas. In urban areas, live trapping with baited box or cage traps is the best method. Cage traps are often available at feed or hardware stores. Almost any type of food can be used as bait to catch skunks. Pet food works excellent, but you run more of a chance at catching a small dog or cat. Fruits such as apples, pears or bananas can be used as well. Skunks rarely release their scent in darkened areas such as completely enclosed live traps that have been carefully covered with burlap or dark plastic. Leave an opening to identify the catch before the trap is removed. Always approach the trap slowly and quietly to prevent disturbing the trapped skunk.

Avoid overly aggressive skunks that approach without hesitation. Any skunk showing abnormal behavior, such as daytime activity, may be rapid and should be treated with caution.

Dennis Smith can be contacted at the Gregg County Extension Office by e-mail at dg-smith@tamu.edu or telephone at: 903-236-8429.

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