

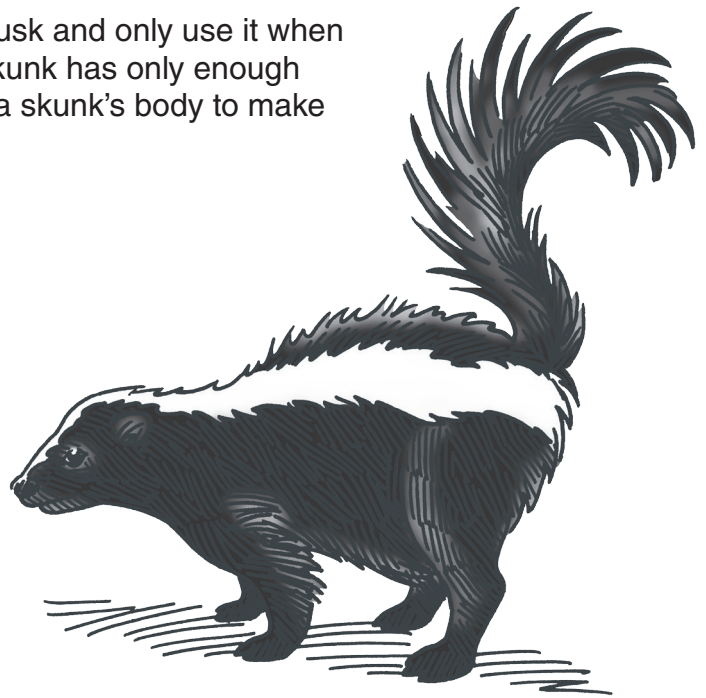
## A Weapon Not Often Used

A skunk is no bigger than a housecat, but it has a weapon that will ward off animals as large as bears. The weapon is a tiny pair of scent glands located at its back that produce a very distinctive musk. The musk's odor is very distinctive because it smells so bad. Some people have described it as a combination of rotten eggs, garlic, and burnt rubber. The smell is very difficult to remove and can linger for weeks and weeks. It can be detected up to one mile (1.6 km) away when it is sprayed.

A skunk can spray its musk with great accuracy because of special muscles surrounding its scent glands. Using these muscles, the skunk can aim at and hit a target 15 feet (4.6 m) away! Animals that are hit can suffer skin irritations and even temporary blindness.

Despite the power and long-lasting effect of its weapon, the skunk does its best not to use it. It may warn its potential victims by stomping its front feet. It may rake the ground with its claws. If that doesn't work, the skunk may arch its back and hiss. As a final warning, it will raise its tail.

The reason the skunk wants to preserve its musk and only use it when necessary is because of a limited supply. A skunk has only enough for five or six uses. It takes about 10 days for a skunk's body to make another supply.



# Auntie Barbara's Feral Cat

When Forest rode his bike to his Auntie Barbara's house, she said, "You're visiting at about the same time one of my cats does! The cat is feral. You know that feral means 'wild,' but I'm slowly domesticating it. Right now it only visits around twilight, but oh, it's such a wonderful creature! You're going to love the way it looks."

"That would make it crepuscular," said Forest as he sat down in the chair his aunt pointed to. "Crepuscular animals are active in the twilight."

"Well, this crepuscular feline has babies now, and they're so cute. The babies follow the mother in a single line—and here she comes!"

Before Forest could turn his head to look, his aunt poured a huge pile of dry cat food on his lap. "Sit perfectly still," she warned. "You can tell if they're irritated with you when they raise their tails. It takes patience to domesticate feral felines, but I know you'll remain calm."

"Such beautiful cats," his aunt crooned as she watched the mother crawl onto Forest's lap while two of the babies tried to climb up the inside of his pant legs. "Don't you just love their big white stripes down their black backs? There's a slight musky odor about them, but I'm sure that will go away once I have them fully domesticated and living inside the house with me."

"Auntie Barbara," said Forest, desperately trying to stay calm, "That may not be such a good idea."

