

Hello Virginia,

On behalf of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee we are pleased to provide to you some assistance regarding your constituent's queries as well as to support a greater understanding of the issues and solutions.

Do not hesitate to forward any other questions you may have regarding this issue.

Warm Regards,  
Wendy Brown  
Animal Welfare Advisory Committee Chair  
City of London

Skunks are a natural and important part of a healthy urban ecosystem and populations fluctuate naturally. They are one of nature's clean-up crew, eating grubs, other harmful insects, as well as fallen fruit, and garbage. Wild animals are motivated by their need for food, shelter, and safety so the most effective way to prevent adverse human wildlife encounters is to prevent the physical access to the food or shelter source that attracted them in the first place. Intentional feeding of wildlife and unintended feeding through improper storage of food, bird seed, left fallen fruit, overflowing bird feeders, placing garbage to the curb the night prior versus the morning of garbage day escalate the frequency of wildlife visitors to resident property.

Proofing decks, sheds, homes to avoid skunks making dens is an effective way to reduce human wildlife conflicts and to avoid having to remove and orphan animals. Removal of skunks is ineffective given this action creates a vacuum on the landscape that is quickly filled by dispersing skunks and becomes a "revolving door" of trapping and or killing. Research has shown that skunks will have larger litters in areas where a lot of trapping has occurred in previous years since there is still plenty of food and shelter (litters of skunks thrive when food and shelter are plenty). Essentially new babies fill the gap left by those that have been trapped and relocated.

Removing skunks can lead to orphaning dependents. Relocation poses many risks for most wildlife because not having established themselves in a new location leaves them vulnerable to territorial adversaries, unfamiliar pets, predation, having to navigate unfamiliar infrastructure, and find/compete for shelter, food, and water at critical sheltering months of the year. Trapping and relocating a mother with her babies also doesn't work. "Because the stress and terror caused by relocation, faced with an unfamiliar territory with no way to find food or shelter, the animal will almost always abandon her babies at the new site. Relocated wildlife almost never survive more than a month or two in their new environment." Quote: Trapping and Relocating wild animals, Toronto Wildlife Centre

Many "nuisance" complaints are motivated by an unexpressed fear of wild animals and can be overcome by providing information on wild animal behavior. Education and co-existence strategies are the most cost effective and empowering solutions for city residents to ensure humans, pet, and wildlife safety as well as ensuring the wildlife that create balanced, healthy urban ecosystems.

If the need for removal is somehow unavoidable, it would be most humane to ensure one does one's homework regarding choosing a wildlife removal company that is experienced regarding humane wildlife removal. To our knowledge the most humane companies in London are: Wild Things and

Professional Wildlife Removal. Understanding the animal's natural history, sensitive timing windows, and humane removal strategies is crucial. There are many "pest control" companies that exist after switching from lawn care pest control, and it is well documented that those companies have left wildlife in horrendous situations as a result of their actions.

Skunks naturally forage for grubs and are often the first indicator that a home owner has a problem with grubs. When there is an abundance of grubs in one's lawn this problem can be solved by treating one's lawn with organic solutions/nematodes and will decrease visitation to your lawn by "natural insect pest patrolling" skunks.

Respecting leash bylaws in green spaces and supervision of pets in backyards can effectively reduce adverse human or pet encounters, albeit skunks are hesitant to spray and humans are rarely the target when it comes to this defensive action. Conducting a backyard scans/checks at dusk and dawn, when skunks are most active, or times of low light and by applying outdoor lighting for better visibility can go a long way to avoid negative encounters.

Additional Recommendations by the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee:

- The sharing of this letter with constituents as well as the link to practical information to assist homeowners as follows: [www.torontowildlifecentre.com](http://www.torontowildlifecentre.com), which contains links for a wide variety of wildlife co-existence strategies and solutions.
- The Animal Welfare Advisory Committee can submit a recommendation for approval by Community and Protective Services to review and provide any necessary updates, resources to the City of London Website with the goal to direct residents to educational information and empower residents to effectively co-exist.
- Deterrents are key: addressing the food source, shelter, and application of additional strategies such as skirting decks and sheds are achievable, long term solutions.
- The AWAC would be delighted to provide information that would enhance city wildlife website information and to assist your constituents.