



WEIRD 'N' WONDERFUL

Pets and reptiles

Introduction Guide To The Care Of

Skunks

Scientific Name: *Physignathus lesueurii*

Life Span: over 20 years with correct care

Size: Skunk species vary in size from about 15.6 to 37 inches (40 to 94 cm)

Appearance: Skunks are mammals best known for their ability to secrete a liquid with a strong, foul odor. General appearance varies from species to species, from black-and-white to brown or cream colored. Skunks belong to the family Mephitidae and to the order Carnivora. There are twelve species of skunks, which are divided into four genera: Mephitis (hooded and striped skunks, two species), Spilogale (spotted skunks, four species), Mydaus (stink badgers, two species), and Conepatus (hog-nosed skunks, four species). The two skunk species in the Mydaus genus inhabit Indonesia and the Philippines; all other skunks inhabit the Americas from Canada to central South America. They can weigh from about 1.1 pounds (0.50 kg) (spotted skunks) to 18 pounds (8.2 kg) (hog-nosed skunks). They have a moderately elongated body with relatively short, well-muscled legs, and long front claws for digging. Although the most common fur colour is black and white, some skunks are brown or grey, and a few are cream-colored. All skunks are striped, even from birth. They may have a single thick stripe across back and tail, two thinner stripes, or a series of white spots and broken stripes (in the case of the spotted skunk). Some also have stripes on their legs.

Temperament and Handling: Do not keep your skunk cooped up in a cage all day; it's unfair and not good for your skunk. Let him out so he can stretch his legs and mooch around. Even train your skunk to the harness and take him for a walk. Make your home skunk proof and give total freedom, just putting him away when you are not around. Skunks do get on with other animal species, such as cats, dogs, ferrets, rabbits etc. They will even share their beds with them, much like in the wild where they will share their burrows with other skunks, racoons and rabbits. Of course, smaller pet species rats, mice, hamsters etc. must be kept out of your skunks reach. They will be at risk of becoming hurt or even killed. Skunks will eat small rodents in the wild. Even if your skunk does get on with your other pets, please make sure they are not left unsupervised. Some skunks enjoy playing with toys, but if you do buy your skunk toys, make sure they are suitable for animals. You can buy animal toys at your local pet shop or online.



WEIRD 'N' WONDERFUL

Pets and reptiles

Housing: Even though your skunk may have his freedom around the house, make sure he has accommodation for when you aren't around, like an indoor rabbit cage; this is mainly for his own safety and for peace of mind. Even if your house is as skunk proof as you can make it, still do not leave your skunk unsupervised and when you are not around put your skunk in his cage. Make sure the cage is a big indoor rabbit cage 23" by 44" (59 cm by 112 cm) or something similar and supply your skunk with a bed, water bottle and litter tray, you can buy corner litter trays which can be tie wrapped to secure them to the cage. Skunks do like their creature comforts and love a nice bed to curl up into. You can buy donut beds, igloo beds (which is a bit like a tent) and fleece blankets which your skunk will love snuggling up in. You can start training your skunk to use the litter tray as soon as you get it; skunks are natural corner poopers, so are quite easy to train. Your skunk should choose his corner to use and when he does put a litter tray in that corner. You could put some of his stalls into the litter tray and show him so he knows that is where he has to go. Eventually he will get the idea. Put several litter trays around the house for your skunk to use, you may find he will use them all, but be aware if the litter trays are full your skunk may do his toilet just outside of it, skunks don't seem to like a dirty tray. To line the litter tray you can use newspaper, this is this less messy. You can use cat litter if you wish, but you may find your skunk will like to dig in it rather than use it for toilet. You may find that your skunk will wipe his bottom on the floor after he has used the litter tray, if you find this a problem you can buy a washable rug which is placed just outside his tray ready for him to wipe his bottom.

Feeding: Skunks are omnivorous, eating both plant and animal material and changing their diet as the seasons change. They eat insects and larvae, earthworms, small rodents, lizards, salamanders, frogs, snakes, birds, moles, and eggs. They also commonly eat berries, roots, leaves, grasses, fungi, and nuts. In settled areas, skunks also seek human garbage. Less often, skunks may be found acting as scavengers, eating bird and rodent carcasses left by cats or other animals. Pet owners, particularly those of cats, may experience a skunk finding its way into a garage or basement where pet food is kept. Skunks commonly dig holes in lawns in search of grubs and worms. Skunks are one of the primary predators of the honeybee, relying on their thick fur to protect them from stings. The skunk scratches at the front of the beehive and eats the guard bees that come out to investigate. Mother skunks are known to teach this to their young. Over the years the skunk diet has been up for debate and in the UK the skunk diet consisted of 90% veg 5% fruit and 5% protein. However what do they really get in the wild in the way of food? It's certainly nothing that gets handed down to them on a plate. Skunks are foraging animals and their diet consists of insects, earthworms, lizards, small rodents such as mice and voles, Eggs, berries, leaves, grasses, fungi and nuts. Skunks are also primary predators of the honey bee and also seek human garbage. After much debate on what skunks should and shouldn't eat I have come to the understanding from skunk specialists in the USA that the whole skunk diet has been reviewed. It is now believed that a lot of veg recommended for skunks is now unsuitable, also skunks fed on kibble based diets do not do well. The low protein fat diet in which skunks are fed today is actually counterproductive. When selecting your skunk's food keep to one rule, keep it natural.



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Pets and reptiles

Skunk Menu – Protein Eggs, either raw, boiled (with shell) slightly scrambled, Quail eggs (raw with shell) Insects, crickets, beetles, mealworms, super worms Hulled seeds and raw nuts, whole nuts, Almonds, Linseed, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, pecans etc.. Chicken (marrow bone can be a substitute for raw chicken one a week) Pinkies (frozen baby mice) Fish, canned salmon or sardines. (Tuna is not the best choice due to mercury content) Cheese in small amounts (e.g. parmesan is a good choice)
Cottage cheese

Calcium (Please be aware that dairy products may cause diarrhoea) Crushed eggs shells made into a powder Cottage cheese, Natural yoghurt, Dried milk, Egg, Dairy products

Vitamins & Minerals In the USA there is a supplement called Taurine, I am unsure if its available in the UK as a supplement, but you can get it in "vita skunk", "oily fish" and other Taurine rich foods. I have listed a selection of supplements that can be purchased at Hyperdrug.co.uk

Vitamins and Minerals (SF50 Powder)

Calcium supplement (Cal D)

Probiotics (Probiotic Plus)

Vegetables A small amount of most veg is acceptable, though it is now recommended that sprouts such as bean sprouts and seed sprouts such as Alfalfa, mustard, garlic, radish, sunflower, chick pea and lentil are better. These can all be grown in jars or in seed trays and left on your window seal ready for harvesting. It is recommended to cut the veg very small or grate it for easier absorption of nutrients. Vegetables are carbohydrates and skunks do not have any dietary requirement for carbs. Bell peppers, Green beans, Radish, Celery, Turnips, Broccoli, Bean sprouts, Mushrooms, Cucumber, Parsnip, Cauliflower, Tomatoes, Courgettes.

Sweet corn and peas are not recommended they are high on glycaemic

Fruit - Berries are preferable, Raspberries, Blue berries, Black berries, Straw berries

Other fruit - Bananas, Apples, Pears, Orange.

Do not feed your skunk grapes or raisins; they have been known to be toxic to other animals and may cause kidney failure, so is not worth the risk.

Foods to not feed your skunk -Chocolate, Red Meats, Cat foods and tinned dog food, Asparagus, All sugary foods, Tinned fruit and veg, Sweets, Avocado, Liquorish is poison to animals, Grapes have been known to be toxic to animal, so it is not worth the risk, Corn on the cob and peas or any veg that has a high glycaemic rate is be avoided

Please note that this is only an introductory guide based on our opinions and experience, we advise you to continually research and learn as much as possible from as many sources as you can, every animal is different and new care and information is always being developed and found 😊

Weird 'N' Wonderful Pets and Reptiles
www.weirdnwonderfulltd.co.uk

128 Alcester Road Moseley Birmingham B13 8EE
0121 449 1684

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