

Nature Notes

Striped Skunk



The striped skunk is seldom seen in the Kimberley Nature Park but occasionally you whiff its presence on the wind! From December to March, these members of the weasel family are hibernating in grass-lined nests. Males hibernate alone while females and young can group together.

Immediately after hibernation, mating occurs. Females are able to begin breeding at nine months and produce litters of up to 10 kits. Gestation is



Striped Skunk

Credit: Erwin C. Nielsen/Painet Inc.

approximately 62 days with the young being born black and white. Within 7 weeks the kits are able to expel musk that marks their territory, fends off enemies, and announces their aggravation when disturbed. The grape sized musk glands lay next to the anus. With the tail raised, striped skunks can spray the

oily, greenish fluid 5 to 6 meters. The sulfur compounds produce a revolting odor that deters most predators such as great-horned owls and coyotes from approaching! The spray can cause momentary blindness, irritation and nausea.

Male striped skunks are approximately 57centimeters in length and weigh 2.5 kilograms. Females are slightly smaller. They live in burrows that they dig or in the shelter of fallen timbers and under building. They waddle around mostly at night using their keen sense of smell to look for food, including insects, grasses, berries, small rodents, bird eggs or whatever is convenient, including human garbage. Life expectancy is only about 4 years.

Striped skunks prefer to live in open spaces with cover nearby, as they don't travel far from their burrows. It is best to give these critters a wide berth if there ever encountered while hiking or biking in the Nature Park!

For a hard copy of this article or more information about Nature Park events, visit our website at www.kimberleynaturepark.ca