

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

North American Hog-nosed Skunk
(*Conepatus leuconotus*)

ORDER: Carnivora
FAMILY: Mephitidae

Conservation Status: A subspecies, the Big Thicket Hog-nosed Skunk, *Conepatus mesoleucus telmalestes*, is Extinct.

Skunks are seldom thought of as useful animals, but Hog-nosed Skunks can be helpful to farmers because they eat crop-destroying insects. They have powerful forelimbs and long claws, suited to digging up insect larvae and grubs. They also eat plant matter and sometimes small rodents if the opportunity arises. Like Striped and Spotted skunks, they are best known for the scent produced by, and sprayed from, their anal glands. Spraying is a last resort. The skunk's dramatic black and white coat serves as a warning signal to other mammals, and its first response is to run. A frightened Hog-nosed Skunk may then turn around to face its adversary, stand on its hind feet, and take a few steps forward, then come down on all fours and hiss. If that doesn't work, the next step is to bare its teeth, raise its tail, and bite, spray, or both.

Also known as:

Gulf Coast Hog-nosed Skunk, White Backed Skunk, Rooter Skunk, Texan Skunk, Badger Skunk, Conepat

Length:

Average: 636.5 mm males; 589.7 mm females
Range: 444-934 mm males; 445-840 mm females

Weight:

Range: 1,135-4,500 g



Conepatus leuconotus – eastern variant (base of tail is black)

Credit: painting by Consie Powell from Kays and Wilson's *Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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Hooded Skunk
(*Mephitis macroura*)

ORDER: Carnivora
FAMILY: Mephitidae

The Hooded Skunk is a desert animal, preferring rocky canyons and valleys, and the vegetation along stream edges. It lives at elevations of less than 2,000 m above sea level. It forages at night for meals that may include small mammals, birds, and some plants, and it digs for beetles and other insects, which seem to be its preferred food. Striped, Spotted, and Hog-nosed skunks are all found within the Hooded Skunk's range. The four species coexist by adopting different behavioral and ecological strategies.



Mephitis macroura – double, thin-striped variant, upper right; single wide-striped variant, lower left
Credit: painting by Consie Powell from Kays and Wilson's *Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)

Also known as:

White Sided Skunk, Southern Skunk, Zorrillo

Sexual Dimorphism:

Males are larger than females.

Length:

Range: 560–790 mm

Weight:

Range: 820–1,200 g



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Striped Skunk
(*Mephitis mephitis*)

ORDER: Carnivora
FAMILY: Mephitidae

The Striped Skunk is the most common skunk in North America, yet most of what we know about it comes from studies of captive individuals. Like all skunks, it has a superb defense system, the ability to spray a foul-smelling fluid from two glands near the base of its tail. Skunk musk is oily and difficult to remove. If sprayed in the eyes, it causes intense pain and temporary blindness. Skunk kittens can spray when they are only eight days old, long before they can aim, a skill they exhibit only after their eyes open at about 24 days. Skunks attempt to give a warning before they spray: both Hooded and Striped skunks stamp their front feet before turning around and spraying. Like all skunks, Striped Skunks are nocturnal and eat a variable diet, mostly of insects, but also including small mammals, carrion, and some vegetation.

Also known as:

Skunk, Big/large Skunk, Polecat

Sexual Dimorphism:

Males are 15% larger than females, but females have longer tails.

Length:

Range: 575–800 mm

Weight:

Range: 1,200–5,300 g



Mephitis mephitis – typical pattern, lower left; white tail variant, upper right

Credit: painting by Consie Powell from Kays and Wilson's *Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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Western Spotted Skunk
(*Spilogale gracilis*)

ORDER: Carnivora
FAMILY: Mephitidae

Eastern and Western Spotted Skunks were for years thought to be one and the same species, but they differ in an important detail of the reproductive process. In the Western Spotted Skunk, a very long period of delayed implantation occurs. The fertilized eggs begin to develop, then stop growing at a very early stage and float freely in the uterus. When they "implant," attaching to the uterine wall, growth begins again. Breeding occurs in September or October and the fertilized eggs remain on hold for 6–7 months. In March or April, development resumes, and two to six kits are born about a month later, coinciding with a plentiful food supply. The skunks are carnivorous, feeding on mice and other small mammals, insects, lizards, birds, and carrion. They also eat some vegetable matter.

Also known as:
Civet Cat, Hydrophobia Cat, Polecat

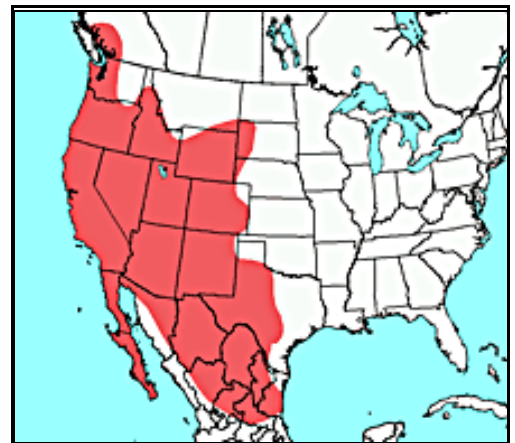
Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are 7%–10% larger than females.

Length:
Average: 425 mm males; 383 mm females
Range: 350–581 mm males; 320–470 mm females

Weight:
Average: 700 g males; 400 g females
Range: 500–900 gm males; 200–600 gm females



Spilogale gracilis – inset shows pattern variation among a family
Credit: painting by Consie Powell from Kays and Wilson's *Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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Eastern Spotted Skunk

(Spilogale putorius)

ORDER: Carnivora
FAMILY: Mephitidae

Spotted skunks are smaller than Striped skunks and more weasel-like in appearance. Like all skunks, they have anal scent glands and can emit a foul-smelling spray to protect themselves. The Spotted Skunk usually sprays as a last resort, if stomping with its front paws or doing a handstand is not sufficient to warn off an intruder. Spotted Skunks are good climbers, able to scurry up and down trees like squirrels, and prefer forested areas to open countryside. They sometimes dig burrows to use for denning, and sometimes choose such places as barns, haystacks, dens abandoned by other mammals, or crevices in trees. Usually they live alone, although in cold weather, several skunks may den together.

Also known as:

Civet-cat, Little Spotted Skunk, Hydrophoby Cat, Little Pole-cat, Four-striped Cat

Length:

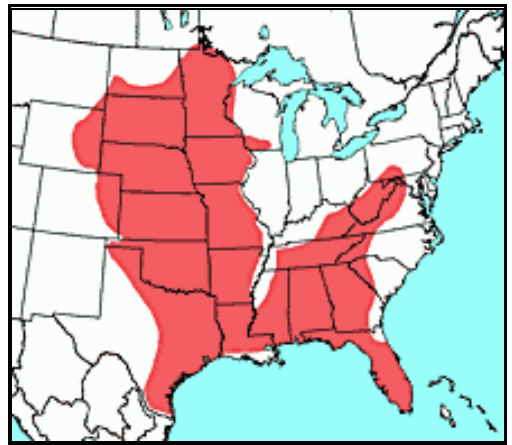
Average: 459 mm males; 422 mm females
Range: 310-610 mm males; 270-544 mm females

Weight:

Range: 276-885 g males; 207-475 g females



Credit: painting by Consie Powell from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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