

Skunk killing alarms SPCA

BY ANDREW FLEMING, BURNABY NOW AUGUST 25, 2010

Workers at the Wildlife Rescue Association (WRA) were left with a bad taste in their mouths after trying in vain to save a skunk that had been shot with a crossbow.

The young female skunk was found in agony on Keefer Street earlier this month with an arrow protruding from her abdomen and was brought to the animal care centre on Burnaby Lake in the hope she could be saved.

"It was pretty horrific, and the skunk was in a great deal of pain," said wildlife rehabilitation worker Lani Sheldon.

"We see many animals in distress brought into the WRA, but it was particularly disturbing to see such a deliberate act of cruelty committed against an animal that poses so few threats to humans."

The SPCA is currently investigating the incident as a case of animal abuse.

She said, despite their infamous ability to cause a stink, skunks aren't a danger to humans and the naturally timid creatures only spray as a last resort. The animals, who have almost no natural predators, also generally give

plenty of advance warning before spraying, including hissing and stamping their paws.

"For sure, skunks have an image problem, but the bum rap they get is unfair," said Sheldon. "Skunks are actually pretty useful creatures to have around. Their natural diet includes slugs, wasps, bees, crickets, grasshoppers, worms, grubs and larvae, so they are perfect natural pest controllers."

The association receives up to 100 skunks a year - almost all with injuries caused by humans. Over the last 18 months, workers have treated skunks for a range of issues, including being hit by cars and shot with pellet guns.

She said homeowners shouldn't worry unnecessarily about the threat posed by the malodorous creatures. A skunk family - a mother and six kits - even set up home alongside the animal rescue group's administration building over the summer.

After being left undisturbed for several weeks, the skunks moved on without causing a stink.

"We didn't even know they were there until a colleague working late saw them come out one night," she said. "We left them alone and they weren't a problem at all. If we can just take a few appropriate measures we can live in harmony with skunks."