

Skunk population on the rise

Rescue, pest control services point to increasing calls

BY TESSA HOLLOWAY, NORTH SHORE NEWS AUGUST 27, 2010



SOME North Shore residents are raising a stink over an apparent explosion in the area's skunk population.

Photograph by: Mike Wakefield, NEWS photo

Katya Zanrosso is used to cleaning the skunk smell off of all kinds of dogs as part of her business, but even at home she gets no relief.

Her four-year-old mastiff cross, Lola, was sprayed twice in one week this summer in their own back yard.

"My son came home and smelled skunk and closed all the windows and the doors thinking the skunk was in the yard, but it was the dog in the house," she said.

Zanrosso, who owns Dirty Doggz Bath House on Lonsdale, isn't the only one raising a stink. Over the past couple of years, incidents have risen dramatically, she said. On the day in question, in fact, she had already handled two at work.

"There are just a lot of skunks," she said.

No agency appears to track skunk populations on the North Shore, but anecdotal accounts suggest numbers have been on the rise recently.

The Burnaby-based Wildlife Rescue Association, which rehabilitates wild animals injured in the Lower Mainland, said that in the past month it has seen a surge from the North Shore, with 10 brought in in the space of two weeks. That may not be indicative of the population, however, said wildlife manager Lani Sheldon. Rather, the animals may just be more active.

Randy Celinski, owner of AAA Pest Control, said he's noticed more calls this year than normal.

This is the busiest time of year for skunks as the warm weather lures them outside, he said. The number of calls usually drops off in the fall, as skunks become more nocturnal and some young skunks die off, said Celinski.

Residents are not powerless in the face of the apparent surge, however.

Celinski said homeowners can reduce the odds of an encounter by ensuring there are no easy living spaces for skunks on their property.

"Look at decks and sheds and front steps, and look for any openings that could allow them access," he said. "They will dig into areas that are unexpected to homeowners."

If people do have skunks living in their backyard they can usually scare them away using a Tupperware container filled with ammonia with holes punched in the lid, said the Rescue Association's Sheldon. A noisy radio clock can also help. However, most skunks will be leaving their dens soon anyway, she added.

Dirty Doggz's Zanrosso recommended that dog owners avoid letting their pets off leash between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., as skunks are most active at night -- a rule she admits she wasn't following when her dog Lola was sprayed.

In the event a mishap does occur, the best way to clean up the smell is a combination of baking soda, hydrogen peroxide and dishwasher liquid, she said. Recipes are available online.

Sheldon encouraged people to see the plus side of skunks. Gardeners should be especially thankful, she said.

"Ninety to 95 per cent of their diet is really beneficial to humans because they're eating lots of rodents and slugs and bugs and larvae, lots of grubs," she said.

Anyone who sees an injured animal or just needs more information on skunks can phone the rescue association at 604-526-7275.

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