

LEVELED BOOK • M

You Stink!



Written by Kira Freed

www.readinga-z.com

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Table of Contents

Nobody Likes You!	4
What Kind of Animal?	6
Why You Stink	8
Skunk Homes	11
Baby Skunks	13
Skunks and People	15
Glossary	16
Index	16



You are a striped skunk.

Nobody Likes You!

Imagine that you are a four-legged animal about the size of a cat. You have short legs and a long, bushy tail. Your soft black fur has long white stripes. You are a beautiful animal, but nobody wants to be your friend. Why not?

You're a skunk, and you stink!
Anyone who smells you or gets
sprayed by you never forgets it.

You and your smelly cousins live in many parts of North and South America. Striped skunks—your kind—are the skunks most people know about. Hooded skunks look like you, but more of their fur is white. Hog-nosed skunks look like hooded skunks with long noses. Spotted skunks have white spots or short stripes.



hog-nosed skunk



hooded skunk

Do You Know?

Not all skunks are black and white. Some skunks are white with brown, tan, or gray. A few skunks are all white.



ferret



badger



raccoon

What Kind of Animal?

You are a **mammal**. This large group also includes whales, bears, deer, mice, and many other animals. Like other mammals, you have a backbone and hair, and your babies are born live. The mammals on this page are some of your closest **relatives**.

Like many of your relatives, you like to eat both animals and plants. More than half of your food is insects. You also like to eat worms, frogs, **rodents**, lizards, snakes, birds, and eggs. Some of your favorite plants are grass, leaves, nuts, and berries.

Do You Know?

Skunks eat garbage in areas where people live. They also eat dead animals left behind by cats. Skunks eat different foods at different times of the year. They don't care what they eat as long as it fills them up.



This dog knows who's the boss!

Why You Stink

You have a secret weapon to keep **enemies** away. You only use it after you try everything else. First, you



stamp your feet if an enemy comes close. Then you hiss and growl. If the enemy doesn't leave, you raise your tail and **arch** your back. You try to look bigger to scare the enemy.

Spotted skunks walk on their front legs to look bigger.



You stand this way when you are getting ready to spray musk.

Sometimes these **warnings** do not work. Then you spray your enemy with a sticky, smelly liquid called **musk**. Musk comes from a pouch at the bottom of your tail. Musk smells worse than terrible. It takes a long time for the strong smell to go away.

Do You Know?

Skunks spray dogs that get too close to them. People wash their dogs with tomato juice to help get rid of the smell.



Your bad smell does not keep great horned owls away from you.

What animals are enemies of you and your stinky cousins? Most other mammals leave you alone. Your black-and-white fur is a warning to keep away. But some large animals think of you as a tasty meal. Great horned owls are your worst enemy. They have a very poor sense of smell.

Skunk Homes

Your home is called a den. You might make your home inside a hollow log. Many of your cousins live in underground **burrows**.

If you live near people, you may live under a house.

You are careful not to spray musk around your home. You don't like your smell any more than other animals do!



This hollow log is a perfect home for you.



Do You Know?

Skunks sleep during the day. They look for food when the Sun starts to go down. Their worst enemy, the great horned owl, is active at night, too.

You spend winter in your den, but you don't sleep all winter as bears do. On warmer days, you come out to look for food.

You don't spend much time with other skunks. But on cold winter days, many of you gather together in a den to keep warm.

Baby Skunks

If you are a female skunk, you give birth to babies in the spring. The babies are called kits. You usually have five or six kits at one time.

Your kits are born with skin that is black and white. Their skin has the same pattern of color that their fur will have someday.



These skunk babies are less than a week old.



These kits are learning about the world around them.

You stay in your den with your kits for about six weeks. Like other mammals, you feed your babies milk so they will grow. Then you take your kits outside. You protect them from animals that might want to eat them. Your kits learn how to find food and stay safe. After nearly a year, they leave you to live alone.

Skunks and People

You and your smelly cousins want people to leave you alone. If people come too close, you might spray them. You might try to bite or scratch, too.

Some of your cousins have a sickness called rabies. Rabies can kill people. This is another good reason for people to leave you alone. But the biggest reason is because you stink!



Do You Know?

Some people keep skunks as pets. Usually, these pets are not stinky. A doctor removes the part that makes musk.

A skunk is a smart pet that needs a lot of attention.

Glossary

arch (<i>v.</i>)	to form a curved shape (p. 8)
burrows (<i>n.</i>)	holes or tunnels dug in the ground by animals for use as a home (p. 11)
enemies (<i>n.</i>)	living things that hurt other living things (p. 8)
mammal (<i>n.</i>)	a warm-blooded animal that has hair or fur, nurses its young, and has babies that are born live (p. 6)
musk (<i>n.</i>)	a sticky, smelly liquid that some animals spray (p. 9)
relatives (<i>n.</i>)	living things related by blood (p. 6)
rodents (<i>n.</i>)	small animals such as mice and their cousins that have large chewing teeth (p. 7)
warnings (<i>n.</i>)	things that tell of a possible danger or problem (p. 9)

Index

den, 11, 12, 14	mammal, 7, 10
enemies, 8–10, 12	musk, 9, 11, 15
food, 7, 12, 14	rabies, 15
kits, 13, 14	

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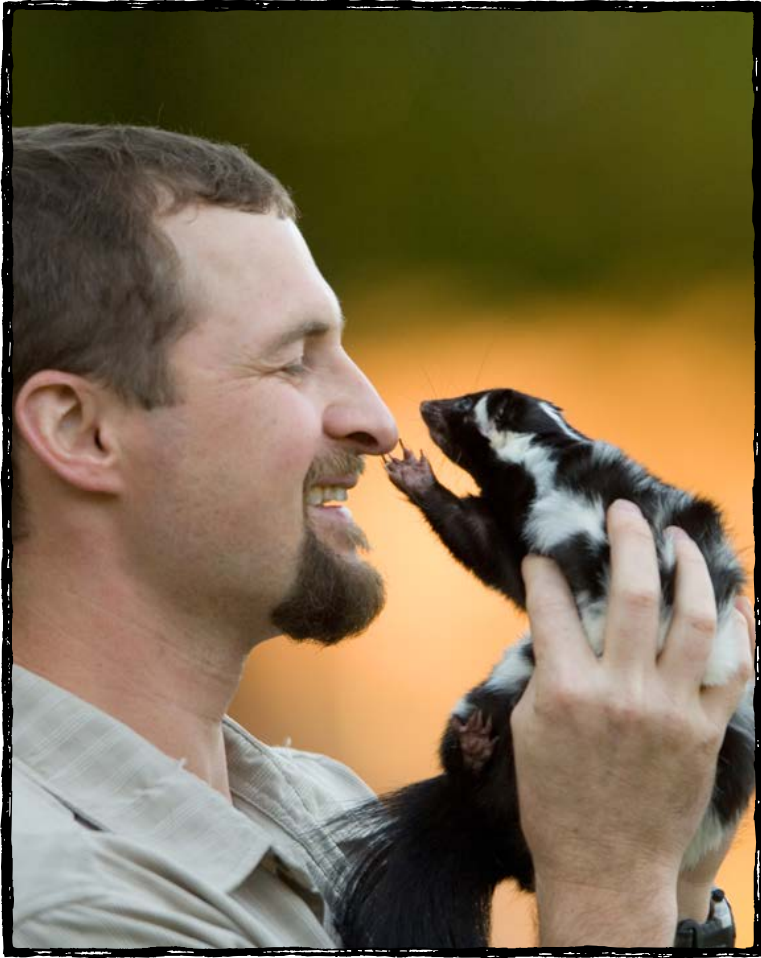
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Reading Recovery	19
DRA	24

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