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Inflammation in Domestic Skunks – Part 2

Identifying Inflammation

One of the easiest ways to check for inflammation is on your skunk's annual blood work. An early indication of inflammation is when the pancreatic enzymes, Amylase and Lipase, are high. Skunks need a daily diet that provides high quality protein and fat. The amount of fat needs to be in proportion to the activity level of the skunk. Protein choices should be as close as possible to a skunk's natural diet. Insects are a skunk's primary protein source in the wild. Eggs are an excellent source of protein and fat. Raw chicken necks, hearts and gizzards are packed with nutrients. Cultured cheeses contain easily digested nutrients. Nuts and seeds are a great non-meat source of protein and fat.

A BARF, Biologically Appropriate Raw Food, diet is good in theory but it takes a little planning to use with skunks. Keep in mind that large bones may not be fully crushed by small animals like skunks and can be dangerous. Pinkies and other small rodents, chicks, and various insects are the only recommended whole prey. A healthy skunk on a species appropriate diet will have blood counts within the normal ranges of Amylase and Lipase. Skunks fed a less than optimal diet low in quality protein and high in carbohydrates will have higher readings of the pancreatic enzymes on their blood work. Skunks with Amylase readings higher than 150 and Lipase higher than 45 may benefit from dietary changes or enzyme supplementation. Lipase most often rises when the skunk is not getting the correct type and or amount of fat from the diet. Saturated fats from animal sources in appropriate portions will not cause this to rise in a healthy skunk. Note that skunks on species appropriate diets are rarely diagnosed with pancreatitis which is common in skunks fed processed foods.

Cholesterol and Triglycerides readings are also higher in skunks fed a diet high in carbohydrates. A healthy skunk will have readings of both in the mid to lower range of normal. Some skunk owners start

supplementing with enzymes when they see the pancreatic enzymes Amylase and Lipase are high. This is fine but if dietary changes are not made, the Cholesterol and Triglycerides will remain high or the higher range of normal indicating there is still a potential problem.

Albumin and Globulin are serum proteins that form building blocks for all the cells in the body. Low albumin is a sign of poor health and considered the best predictor of mortality. Globulin blood levels can rise in cases of long term, chronic inflammation. In my opinion, there is always a serious health condition involved when the Globulin rises. Together Albumin and Globulin make up the total protein.

Reference ranges to check for inflammation for the Striped Skunk are below. Your veterinarian is trained to look for signs of disease and major health problems. As skunk owners, we can use this information to make sure the diet being fed is working for the animal and make changes as needed. A healthy species appropriate diet is the best way to maintain the health of your skunk.

Amylase-80 to 230
 Lipase-0 to 45
 Cholesterol-60 to 250
 Triglycerides-25 to 190
 Albumin-2.2 to 4.5
 Globulin-2.2 to 4.9
 Total Protein-5.3 to 8.5

Inflammatory Illnesses or Conditions

- * Aleution Disease Virus
- * Bone, joint and disc problems
- * Heart disease
- * Liver disease
- * Kidney disease
- * Thyroid disease
- * Cancer
- * Diabetes
- * Allergic reactions

Above are the top health issues we are seeing more frequently in domestic skunks. All of these health issues share the common denominator of inflammation. Processed foods containing grains will only increase this inflammation. An inflammatory diet has absolutely no advantages for the skunk and should be avoided to lessen the skunk's chances of suffering a disease that is painful for them and expensive for you. It does not have to cost more to feed your skunk correctly and whatever the short term convenience of putting down processed food is far outweighed by the cost of increased veterinary care and the sadness and regret when your skunk's life span is shortened or his quality of life is poor.

Skunks born after 2003 are dying younger at a faster rate, many between 3 and 5 years, than skunks born previous to that year. Most skunk owners were led to believe their skunk would live between 8 and 10 years. It was not uncommon for some skunks to live past the age of 10 not too long ago. Many believe ADV plays a part in the higher mortality. Some believe poor breeding practices have weakened the gene pool. The reason why is not really relevant because it is out of control of skunk owners and whatever the reasons are, they are not comforting to those who have lost their skunks far too soon. We can control what we feed our pets and feeding an anti-inflammatory diet is highly recommended.

Fighting Inflammation

As mentioned above, the best way to prevent inflammation is to feed the skunk a species appropriate diet that does not contain processed foods or grains. A low carbohydrate diet that contains healthy protein and fat in portions appropriate for the skunk's activity level will increase your skunk's chances of a long, healthy life.

An annual wellness visit for skunks between age 1 and 5 with a veterinarian experienced in skunk care is recommended. Senior skunks may need to be seen more often and skunks with serious health conditions should be seen as often as the vet recommends. Full blood work during the wellness visit to verify the diet is working for the skunk is extremely important. Catching a problem while it is still treatable or sometimes even avoided completely is priceless.

After the initial canine distemper vaccine is given, no other vaccines are recommended without requesting blood titers. Vaccinosis has been diagnosed in skunks who received repeated vaccines. Some have responded to homeopathic treatments, some do not. Blood titers can be run during the annual wellness check though in my experience with my own skunks they have maintained their immunity from the original vaccine given.

If the annual blood work shows signs of inflammation, ask your veterinarian how serious it is. There may be inflammation but no clear signs of disease yet in which case they will want to monitor the situation. In cases like that it may be possible to reduce the inflammation with supplements.

A few simple changes can give you peace of mind knowing you have actively participated in keeping your skunk as healthy possible. They are more than worth it!

Maria Ellis
August 30, 2009



Did You Know?



Female skunks are induced ovulators and can hold their eggs for up to a year.

You can contact us if you need to re-home your skunk.
We can help you at no charge if you want to adopt a skunk.

Featured Skunk

Henri

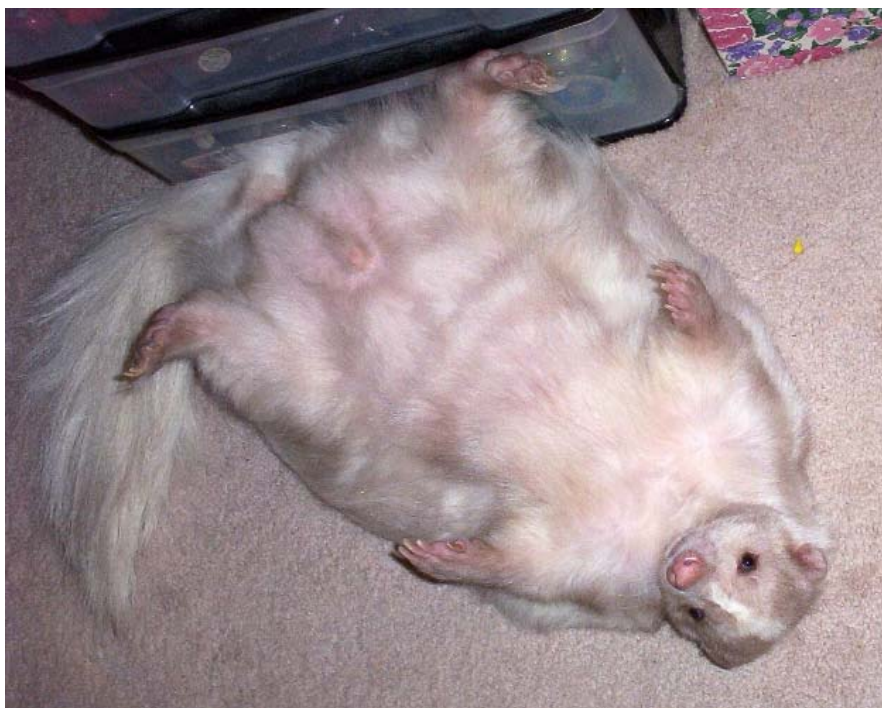
Losing Henri - My Experience with Metacam

By Jennifer Lowell

On February 21, 2006, I took Henri (my otherwise very healthy not quite 6 year old skunk) in to see his regular vet, Susan Kelleher. I noticed he had a slight limp and wanted to be sure he was O.K. She took x-rays and concluded that he had a touch of arthritis in his right knee. She gave me two different medicines and the option to choose which to give. One was Torbutrol, which she explained was a narcotic, and the other was Metacam / Meloxicam, an “*anti-inflammatory*”, which she likened to “you or I taking a Tylenol”.

Naturally the narcotic sounded dangerous and unnecessary, so I chose the Metacam believing I made the safer choice. I started him off very slowly and even gave him **half** of the recommended dosage. He seemed to improve and I continued him on the Metacam, again keeping the dose at less than half of what she prescribed. When I took him back for a follow up visit, she was pleased with his improvement and advised that I continue him on the Metacam indefinitely. I did, and not quite one month to the day of this therapy, we had a weekend where he didn't eat. I took him in to her first thing Monday morning (March 20th), and she advised I leave him there because he was dehydrated. They apparently started to administer I.V. fluids, but the damage was already done and he didn't make it through the night. She called me to tell me what had happened and offered to do an unofficial necropsy on my behalf. She had no conclusions from this but did offer that she found “over a cup of infectious fluid floating freely in his abdomen”.

J.B.L. 8/2009



Henri's story is one that continues to be repeated from other skunk owners that have used Metacam. Please make sure your veterinarian is aware of the dangers and you as an owner should refuse to use Metacam.

Fun Tips

It is always fun to give a boiled egg to our skunks. Some know immediately what to do and start “hiking” it from their front legs to the back legs. This is how they open it. You may have to help some out by cracking it slightly so they know what’s inside.



Mary Vice
August 16, 2009

If you would like your skunk to be featured in our newsletter, send a story and pictures to:
StripedBandits@yahoo.com

Recipe of the Month

Spaghetti Squash Sketti

- 1 Small to Medium Spaghetti Squash
- 2 to 3 Tablespoons Minced Garlic
- 1 Small Diced Tomato
- ½ Cup Grated Parmesan Cheese

Put escape holes in the skin of the squash and bake at 350 degrees for approximately 45 minutes. Cut the squash open, remove the seeds and remove the squash from the skin. Mix in the above ingredients. Serving size is 1 teaspoon.

This is a nice change of pace when spaghetti squash is in season. Make sure you always cut those escape slits in your squash before baking or this is what will happen.



Question for Ashlar



Question: My husband just joined the Army and there's a very good chance that we may have to go overseas. I can't stand the thought of not being able to take my skunk along. Any suggestions on how I could bring him with me?

Ashlar says: It's not very likely you will be able to bring the skunk along. Depending on the country he is called to, it may or may not be legal to bring the skunk into the country. Quarantine laws are very strict and your skunk would be quarantined for a very long time, not good for his health or disposition. I wish I had better news.

Do you have a question you would like answered in a future issue?

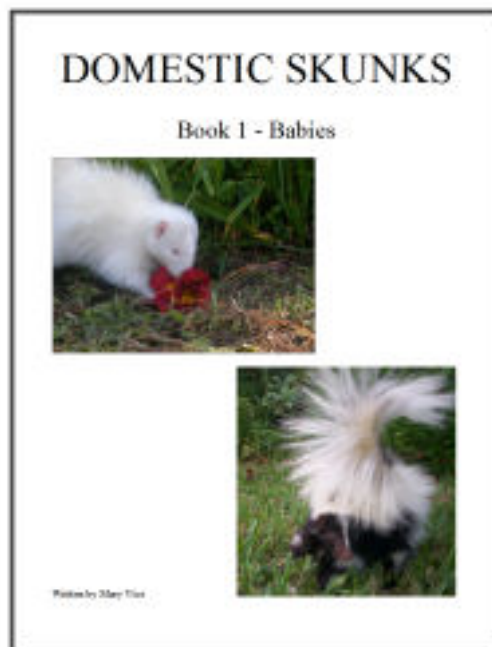
Go to www.stripedbandits.com and fill out the question form.

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