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(Note there is no e at the end. Twitter wouldn't allow it)

This issue dedicated in loving memory of:

Daisy 1999 – 12/2/09

Vinny 2002 – 12/9/09

Chaos 6/03 – 12/16/09

Tinkerbelle 2000 – 1/2/10

Gandolf 3/18/02 – 1/23/10

Jedi 3/02 – 2/2/10

This is a special edition of the Mephitis Advocate. Due to our loss of Gandolf and the subsequent diagnosis of Ashlar's heart disease and Maria dealing with illness in her family, we decided rather than to hastily put out substandard information, it would be best to wait until our lives settled down a bit.

We apologize for the interruption in service but hope our readers understand that our families, skin and fur, must always come first.

Part 3 of the "4 Things" series will resume in next month's newsletter.

Once again, we are asking for help from our readers. We need stories submitted so we can compile a collection to choose from for those times that we have things going on in our lives. This will save us from having to skip doing issues in the future.

Many of you out there have taken in rescues that you are proud of their success and/or progress. Here is the perfect chance to show them off. Don't forget to include the before and after pictures!

Mary Vice
February 28, 2010

Featured Skunk

Gandolf

Gandolf, Merlin and Gabrielle came to us together when their former owner could no longer afford to take care of them (that was her story anyway). Gandolf and Merlin were both 5 and Gabby was 4 when we got them. They were already in their second home. Gandolf's first owner used to spray him with a pressure washer until his skin peeled, just to do it. His second home wasn't any better for him. Landa and I made the trip one day to pick them up and were quite surprised at what we saw. I was told they were all healthy and at good weights. That surely wasn't the case at all. She made a point to show us how cute Gandolf's "cleavage" was. This picture shows him right after coming here at 16 pounds.



May 10, 2008 – Gandolf's first stomp



They reaked of the perfume she doused them and everything else with to cover the smell. I didn't find out until getting home that their carrier was totally infested with roaches. Former owner still had two remaining with her that I tried desperately to get once I realized how badly all the skunks were being treated, but she wouldn't let the last two go. They both died less than a year later of gangrene because she allowed them to wallow in their own waste. I know this would have been Gandolf's fate too, because he had arthritis that was not being treated. I know it wouldn't have been long before he too was laying in his own waste. Gandolf responded very well to his arthritis treatment and before long, we were celebrating his first stomp.

He continued to improve to the point that his arthritis was barely noticeable anymore except with his Gandolf shuffle. He always sound like an old man walking in his slippers, earning him the nickname of Grandpa Slippers. Somewhere along the line, Gandolf decided he could climb. He was constantly climbing the coffee table and jumping down. We kept telling him he couldn't do that, but he refused to listen.



He loved outside and even when he could hardly walk, he would RUN away from us when it was time to go back inside.

Gandolf's all time favorite sport was eating. He had no problem letting us know if we weren't prompt enough with meal time or that it was rude for not sharing.



Gandolf was a gentle, loving soul that overcame any obstacle that was thrown his way. He was a fighter that didn't know how to give up. One day Gandolf walked into the kitchen dragging one leg behind him. It had been brutally cold, so we thought his arthritis was acting up. We observed him for a few days, but when he was still having trouble walking, we brought him in to the vet. The news was devastating. His heart was in bad shape and actually pinching off the liver. The vet had trouble getting a good view of what was going on with the heart on just the Xrays, so we scheduled an ultrasound. Since his body temperature was 91 degrees, we also had to find a way to keep him warm and make sure his food was warmed. He was put on Enalapril and Lasix, but the meds were not helping him. We did see some slight improvement in his mobility once the fluid was expelled, but the heart function had no improvement. He was being kept warm by sleeping with about 5 or 6 of the other skunks. They seemed to know he needed it. The ultrasound showed the damage was in the left side of the heart, which the vet explained is not treatable. If it had been the right side, we would be able to at least maintain, but not with the left side.

He went from only eating pinkies and worms to not eating at all. We had to start syringing him, which he hated. He further regressed and was now lying in his own urine and totally horrified at the thought of being cleaned up. He was losing his dignity. We have no doubt that he would have continued to fight his latest obstacle until it was past time for him to fight.

We decided to let him go with the dignity deserving of such a proud soul and made the decision to lay him to rest. He no longer has to fight and is free of the pain and limitations of his earthbound body, where he can once again play and stomp and eat hearty.

Mary Vice
February 28, 2010

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.

We need stories!

Please submit any of your skunk's stories to

StripedBandits@yahoo.com

SO YOU WANT A PET SKUNK?

ADOPT OR BUY – THE BIG DECISION

By Brenda and Don Hoch

January 29, 2010

You were at the pet shop and saw a cute baby skunk or visited a friend that has a skunk. Now you think you would like to have a pet skunk. What do you do? Your first step should be **RESEARCH**. Don't let the impulse of getting a cute unusual pet get the better of you. Not everyone is suited for skunk ownership. Your decision should be based on as much information as possible so you can make your decision wisely. There won't be much information in the library but you'll find tons of information on internet sites like the Florida Skunk Rescue, Striped Bandits, Skunks as Pets, and OOPS (Owners of Pet Skunks) to name a few. There are people in these groups you can contact who will gladly answer your questions. On the Striped Bandits site you can purchase Book 1 of a 4 part series on Domestic Skunks written by Mary Vice and company. While this volume is titled "Babies" it still has valuable information for older skunks as well as babies. We've owned skunks going on 4 years now and found the book to be a good refresher for things we had forgotten.

The first couple of things you'll need to research include:

Legality. If you are in Florida, then yes it is legal to possess a domestic skunk with the proper permit. If you are not from Florida, is skunk ownership legal in your State? There aren't many States left where you can legally possess a domestic skunk. Something else to consider is do you plan to reside in your legal "Skunk State" for the life of your skunk? If you live in legal state and are thinking about moving or might have to relocate due to your job, you may not be able to take your skunk with you to your new state. Skunks aren't the most portable pets due their classification as "exotic wildlife" and can live to be 10 to 12 years or older in captivity. In addition, some states will only let you possess skunks bred in that state or may not let you have black and white skunks.

In Florida, you'll need to apply for and have your Class III "skunk" permit before you can obtain a skunk legally. It is illegal to possess a skunk without a permit and could result in the confiscation and/or death of your pet. To apply for a permit go to www.myfwc.com. In approximately 2-3 weeks you'll receive your permit.

There are two types of Class III permits in Florida – both are renewed yearly:

Class III, No-Cost Personal Pet Permit. This permit allows you possess a skunk as a pet in your home but you are not allowed to take the skunk out in public. With this permit you must also fill out a questionnaire about skunk care and submit it along with your application.

Class III, For Exhibition or Sale Permit. This is a \$50 per year fee permit which allows you to possess skunks and take them out in public. You need this permit if you wish to bring your skunks to a skunk show such as the Skunks As Pets Skunk Show held annually in Daytona Beach. This year's show is scheduled for Saturday, October 2, 2010 at the LaPlaya Resort. More information will be available in a few months.

NOTE: Both of these permits now require you to fill out a disaster plan. Only page 1 of the disaster plan has to be returned with your permit application. The remaining pages need to be kept handy in case of a visit from Fish & Wildlife. You'll also need to maintain accurate records including the permit # of the pet shop or person where you obtained your skunk(s).

Adopt or Buy. Do you want a baby skunk (approx. 6-8 weeks old) or are you willing to adopt a skunk from a skunk rescue group? If you only want a baby skunk, you'd better plan on purchasing one from a pet shop that sells exotic pets or directly from a breeder. Skunks only come into heat and breed once a year – usually in late February - and the babies are born in early May. Pet shops get skunks in mid to late June. When you buy a skunk from the pet shop or a breeder, the baby skunks have been de-scented (the scent glands removed). **Caution** - de-scented does not mean that they have been spayed or neutered nor have they had any shots. Skunks must be spayed or neutered to maintain their even temperament plus breeding season is very stressful for your skunks. You'll need to

contact the pet shop or breeder during January or February as they'll most likely require a deposit to get on their waiting list. There are 9 different colors of domestic skunks - are you willing to take the "original" black and white or are you looking for a particular color? Price depends on the color and can range from approximately \$300 on up.

If you don't mind getting a "pre-owned" juvenile (under 1 year) to adult skunk several years old, then by all means, adopt a skunk. Color is luck of the draw, and if you want a certain color, you may wait a long time unless you purchase the skunk. In our experience, neither sex nor certain color makes a better pet than the other. If you adopt from the Florida Skunk Rescue there is no fee involved but you must have your permit. The Rescue is devoted to finding good homes for unwanted or abandoned skunks, or skunks whose owners had to relocate to a State where skunks are illegal. How long it takes to adopt depends on how often they get skunks – skunks usually come in on a fairly regular basis (unfortunately for the skunks). September or October are prime months as this is about the time when the newness of that "cute unusual" pet wears off. Once you put in your application, and you get the a call or email that a skunk is available, you need to act quickly in responding if you want the skunk as they go quickly and it's the first responder that usually gets the skunk.

If adopting from the Rescue, you do need to be prepared for the possibility of traveling some distance to pick up your skunk. If you live on the West Coast of Florida like we do, you may have to make a trip to the East Coast. Many skunks come from the Ft. Lauderdale/Miami area. For us, it's about a 3-1/2 hour trip each way across State Road 60 to our meeting spot. For several months last year, it seemed like the Port St Lucie rest stop on the Florida Turnpike was our second home as we were there so often. This rest stop was a convenient half way point for us and the person we were meeting, not to mention it had a Cinnabon store. Boy were we mad when they got rid of that store - besides getting a new skunk; it was the highlight of the trip since our closest Cinnabon is in Tampa.

Some other things you need to be prepared for especially when adopting a skunk are:

If you get a young skunk, there's an excellent chance the former owner didn't have the skunk long enough or maybe the money to have the skunk vet checked, spayed, or neutered.

Due to poor diet or overfeeding the skunk may have yellow fur or be obese. All but 2 of our rescue skunks have been obese.

Depending on age, some skunks may be a little nippy at first. It could be the former owner didn't spend much time handling the skunk or the skunk could just be scared. Baby skunks are like puppies, some of them can be a little nippy when they are very young. Usually what happens is once bitten the owner get gun shy about handling the skunk for fear of being nipped again. Or the skunk could have been kept caged all the time. How would you feel being caged day in and day out? Skunks are very social animals and like to be held and cuddled. Fortunately with time, patience and attention, a nippy skunk can become very loving and sweet.

Whichever option you choose, there are still other decisions you need to make while waiting for your skunk.

Diet. Many people are under the misconception that you can feed skunks cat or dog food. These foods are very bad for skunks as they are too high in protein and the dye in them could be what turned your rescue skunk's fur yellow. Also, they are very fattening. The pelleted skunk diet some pet shops carry isn't much better. Skunks don't have a lot of molars and this hard food can wear down their teeth. Skunks are omnivorous meaning they eat not only vegetation but some meat and other protein as well. As with everything, there are a lot of opinions on the equation of the proper diet but all agree on the no dog or cat food rule. You'll need to decide which diet you are going to follow. A diet of proteins like meal worms, super worms, crickets, pinkies, with some sprouts, nuts and berries is best. Avoid any junk food, i.e. potato chips, candy, cookies and especially chocolate. Feeding your skunk a good diet and maintaining a good weight will keep them healthy, save on vet bills, and extend their lifespan. Skunks only have stomachs the size of a half dollar so you are not starving them by feeding them only ¼ cup of food twice a day. Skunks are big beggars and will try to make you believe they are starving, even if you just fed them 5 minutes ago. Do not give in to their begging.

Household. What is the makeup of your household? Do you have children? What are their ages? Are they old enough to understand how to properly handle a skunk? Skunks when scared or hurt sometimes nip out of fear and a small child could end up with a nasty cut. Do you own a ferret? Skunks and ferrets are natural enemies so you would need to keep them separated at all times and introduce them cautiously but never leave them unsupervised and alone together. Do you own snakes? Skunks sometimes eat snakes in the wild and some snakes are big enough to eat a skunk if they get loose. What other pets do you own? We do greyhound rescue and some greyhounds right off the track still have that chase instinct. We have to be cautious when we get a new foster to

see how they react to the skunks. Our own greyhound was picked from a former foster because he was OK sharing his home with skunks.

Skunk-Proofing Your Home. Are there cabinets that have harmful chemicals like cleaning products in them? What about glasses or dishes in them that if broken can cut your skunk? Skunks can open kitchen cabinets very easily. Put baby latches on cabinets that contain these items or any cabinets you don't want your skunk to get into. We've learned from experience that you can't buy the cheap "latch" type childproof locks as your skunk can make opening them look like child's play. The first latch type lock we installed was opened by one of our skunks less than 5 minutes after it was installed. In addition, these latch type of locks still open up wide enough for a skunk to squeeze through the opening into the cabinet. In our experience you need to purchase the magnet type locks as we've haven't found a skunk yet that can climb with the magnet between their paws to open them. Refrigerators are also popular once they figure out this is there their veggies are stored. Check for opening under doors, sinks, and around washing machines and dryers vents where your skunk can escape. You'll be amazed how small your skunk can make himself when he wants to get somewhere he's not supposed to be. Even bi-fold closet doors are a piece of cake for them. They just love to find out what is behind that closed door barring their entrance. Drawers are also another temptation for the skunks so be careful before shutting a drawer that you don't remember opening. There could very well be a skunk or two behind it. A couple of our skunks will open a draw, squeeze behind the back of the drawer into the cabinet, then use the back of the other drawers as a ladder to climb up into the top drawer and take a nap.

Money/Vet Care. How much money will you need initially for your skunk? In addition to the purchase price if you decide to buy a skunk, you should also put aside some money for vet care including checkup, vaccinations, and the possible spay or neuter. The cost of the spay/neuter all depends on your vet. One vet in our area charges \$87.50 for the neuter and \$155 for spaying plus around \$90 for the initial exam with the distemper shot. Another vet in the area charges \$250 for a neuter. This is also a good time to look

around about a good skunk vet in your area. Just because the vet treats exotic animals does not mean they are skunk savvy. Don't forget money for gas for the trip to get a skunk if you've decided to adopt.

Other Skunks. If you already have a skunk and get another, how fast they get along together will vary from skunk to skunk. Some skunks take to each other right away; some do a lot of stomping, growling and squealing at the other skunk with an occasional nip. Others need to be kept totally separated from each other by a baby gate until they accept each other. Skunk's teeth are very sharp and you don't want one of the skunks getting a serious injury. Some of our rescues have been taken into the fold with no problem and yet others have taken a while to be accepted. I usually keep a squirt bottle handy to discourage any bad behavior like nipping. One day you'll be surprised to find them sleeping in a corner together like best buddies.

So now that you have some basics are you going to adopt or buy? There are benefits to both. We started with a 6 month old skunk we purchased at a pet shop after doing our homework and we still weren't totally prepared. We did have back up from the wonderful people associated with the Florida Skunk Rescue and Skunks as Pets such as Lynnda Butler, Maria Ellis, and Judy Slade to name a few. We now have 9 skunks, 8 of which were rescues. If you buy a skunk, you have a cute little baby skunk that you can nurture along to adulthood but you also will have a "terrible two's" period just like a puppy where they might be nippy or refuse to potty in their litter box, etc. If you adopt a skunk, depending on its age, you might miss the "terrible two's" as well as not have the cost of purchasing, spaying or neutering. Most times you'll have a skunk that after their nervousness wears off, will be loving and affectionate very quickly. Of the 9 skunks we have, with 1 exception, our first skunk, Spike, was nippier and less cuddly and affectionate than all the rescues combined. In hindsight, this was due to his age. Young skunks want to run and explore their big new world. They nip and try your patience and don't want to be held and cuddled all that much. It isn't until they reach 1 to 2 years of age that they grow out of this phase. Of course, the fact that he was an only skunk and spoiled rotten till he was 1-1/2 years old probably didn't help. Now that he's 3 and has lots of competition, he's had a total personality change. If we have the choice to buy or adopt, we choose to adopt because we're giving a good home to a skunk in need plus a skunk that loves to be held. In the next issue of the Advocate, we will discuss some of our rescues and the things we encountered with them.

Contest Winners

We hosted a contest for the best Christmas picture.

1st place received 5 pounds of DE and 2nd place received 1 pound of DE.

All the pictures were great! Congratulations to the winners!

1st place winner – Rhonda



2nd place winner - Chris



Now Available For Purchase!

Domestic Skunks, Book 1 – Babies

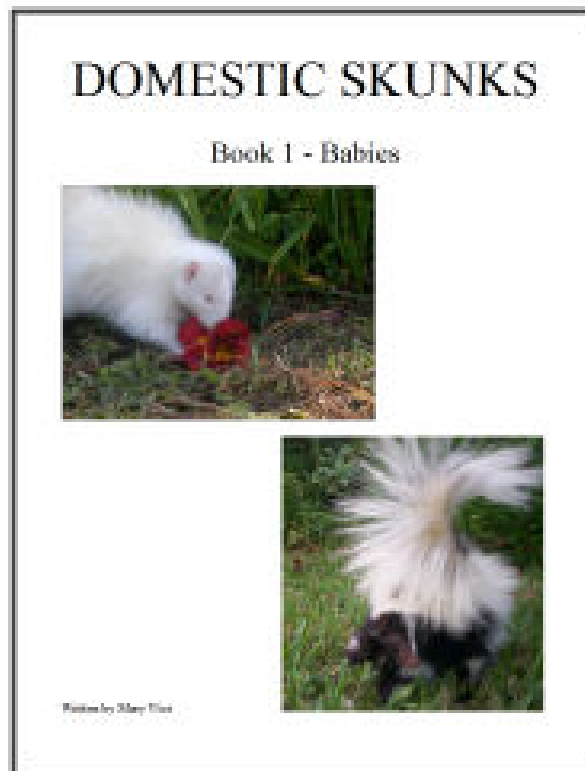
~ Testimonial from a happy customer ~

I love your book. I'm getting my first baby skunk in the next 2 weeks and I can't wait.

Your book is the best I've seen. Please can you email me when you have books 2, 3 and 4.

Many thanks,

Patricia



\$15.50 each (includes domestic USA postage)

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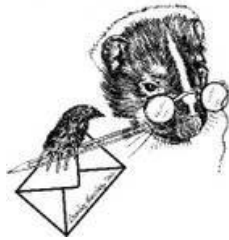
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Question for Ashlar



Ashlar is on sick leave right now so Sophie has graciously agreed to answer the following question submitted to Ashlar.

Question: Do you have studies to support the inflammatory effects of soybeans in skunks?



Answer by Sophie

Not that I am aware of. There are not many studies on skunks and unlikely there would be any done on skunks with foods not part of their natural food chain. Most studies done on the health benefits of soybeans were funded by the soy industry. Setting aside studies paid for by companies who have a financial stake in the outcome, there is little evidence of soy being a healthy food for skunks or any other pet and much available on the negative side effects.

Inflammation is like the chicken or the egg, which came first? When grains or other carbohydrates are fed to skunks, inflammation shows up in the blood work. A normal range for amylase, an enzyme secreted by the pancreas, for a skunk is 80-230. Skunks fed a species appropriate diet low in carbohydrates will have amylase levels of 150 or lower. In this case inflammation can be seen first and if not addressed, the inflammatory condition arrives later. While there is not the same direct link to inflammation with soy, the hormonal effect soy has on the subject can depress the thyroid. Low thyroid function is linked to heart disease, obesity, and digestive problems such as allergies and gas. All of these health conditions are classified as inflammatory conditions.

There are a few other things that make soy a poor choice to feed skunks. Soybeans contain the highest level of phytic acid of any legume. It is well documented that phytic acid blocks absorption of calcium, magnesium, zinc, iron and other important minerals. Skunks fed processed foods are already at higher risk for bone and joint problems and will not benefit from foods that block mineral absorption. Skunks fed processed, pet foods frequently have thyroid issues that disappear after a diet change to unprocessed foods. Soy is used to increase the protein content of pet foods even though there are studies on animals showing it is linked to pancreatic disorders and stunted growth due to inhibitors which interfere with protein digestion. Soy is also on the list of foods heavily contaminated by pesticides. Farmers use soy to fatten animals for slaughter and obesity is a common problem in skunks.

More than 90% of the soybeans grown in this country are genetically modified. There are plenty of studies in animals about the negative effects of feeding genetically modified organisms. While organic, fermented soy may have some health benefits for humans when used as the Asians do as condiments, there are no benefits to feeding genetically modified soy to skunks or other pets.

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

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

If there is a topic you would like to see on the newsletter, contact me at stripedbandits@yahoo.com.

If you want to be removed from this mailing, please let me know at stripedbandits@yahoo.com.

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