Is This Skunk Truly Orphaned?

If the baby skunk is out of its burrow for extended periods of time on its own, it is likely orphaned and worth trying to catch.

Raising a Single Skunk

If you determine that the skunk is orphaned, it will have littermates that also need help so continue to check the area frequently for up to a week. If no others are found it is vital to the skunk's proper socialization and release to be raised with other skunks, a single skunk has little chance of a successful release. Contact vets or local humane societies to try and find a buddy. If this is impossible, handling of the skunk should be minimal, give toys to stimulate, keep confined (i.e. in a cage), and **do not** treat as a pet. It is illegal to keep as a pet plus it wouldn't make a good pet, as it's a wild animal.

Aging The Skunk

In order to properly care for the baby you have found, it is important to know its age. Consult the chart below to assess age.

Feeding

Required Formulas/Tools

- Pedialyte
- Esbilac powder
- 1cc or 5cc oral syringe

Orphans that have been without their mother will be suffering from chill and dehydration. They must be thoroughly warmed first, and then offered warmed rehydration solution. **Pedialyte** is a rehydration solution that is available in drug stores- it should be heated to body temperature and offered every couple hours for the first several feedings. Feed the baby skunk esbilac powder, mix only enough for 24hrs and keep it refrigerated. **Esbilac** is a puppy milk replacer, which you should be able to purchase at a vet or pet store. Cow's milk, human baby formulas, and most pet products (except Esbilac) are **not suitable** and will likely cause death. Use a **1cc or 5cc oral syringe** (try a vet or pharmacy), warm the formula, and hold the skunk in a towel, firmly, and covering its eyes. **CAUTION:** The skunk will suck very quickly and take too much formula if you are not in total control. If this happens the skunk will sneeze formula out of its nose, **STOP** feeding, turn upside down, gently rub its back, and gently wipe the excess formula from its nose. Repeat this for about 5 minutes or until the sneezing stops and breathing returns to normal. If severe this can cause immediate death or pneumonia on a long-term basis. This is why bottles are **not suitable** to use. To avoid this from occurring, feed in a quiet room, go slowly and watch both the skunk and the syringe, if air bubbles appear in the syringe, **STOP** feeding and expel the air, (see chart on back for feeding schedule). Once feeding is finished, wash its face well with a damp face cloth, as formula dries quickly and can cause fur loss.

Critical Step After Feeding (stimulation to urinate or have a bowel movement)

It is very critical that baby skunks are stimulated to urinate before and after every feed. The skunk may be doing it a bit on its own but this may be overflow and if not stimulated the bladder will rupture. To stimulate a baby skunk hold it over a garbage container. Dip either your finger or a Q-tip in warm water

and then light feathery strokes over its genital area will cause the skunk to urinate and/or have a bowel movement. Once the skunk starts to pee don't stop as the skunk will then stop.

Supplements After Weaning

There are several supplements that are recommended be added to a skunk's diet after it is weaned:

- **Taurine** - an amino acid that is available in capsule form from health food stores. Open capsule and sprinkle granules on skunk's food. Each weaned skunk should get 150 mg. per day.
- **Calcium** - 50 mg. elemental calcium per skunk per day - this can be sprinkled on food. It is important as skunks can suffer from metabolic bone disease.
- **Vitamin D** - 30 IU Vit D-3 (divide the tablet by 13 if it is a 400 IU tablet). Vitamin D assists in calcium being properly absorbed.

If you are not able to get calcium and vitamin D, you can sprinkle **bone meal** on food for weaned skunks.

Disease

Skunk kits often carry **roundworms** and may need to be de-wormed, you can talk to a vet about this. Skunks are susceptible to **distemper**, you may want to consider having the skunk(s) vaccinated for distemper as well as against **rabies**. If you are concerned about rabies, you may want to consider having a pre-exposure vaccine for anyone who will be handling the animals-call your vet for further information. Furthermore, with all animals, you should always take precautions to avoid being bitten while you are handling the animal.

Housing

Housing requirements will change as the skunk grows and develops, see chart below for details.

Release

The skunks will not be ready to be released until they are **16 weeks old** (usually late August or early September). It is ideal for the skunks to spend approximately 2 months in their large outdoor cage (4ft x 8ft, made of 1” welded wire mesh). The cage should also have a bottom made out of welded wire mesh to prevent the skunks from being able to escape, the cage should sit flat on the ground and the bottom can be covered with some earth. A nesting box (20” x 15” and 12” high) sits on the floor of the cage. A sand box should also be in the cage that is used for digging, make sure to change the sand frequently. Do not allow the family pets access to the skunks, otherwise you are teaching them they have nothing to fear from domestic cats or dogs, something that could cost them their life in the wild.

For release, choose a site well away from roads, with a mixture of woods, brushy corners, open fields, a water source nearby, and abandoned buildings. Before releasing it is important to investigate the area, if there are neighbours trapping or harming skunks, they should not be released there. Also, check the forecast to be sure there will be at least 2-3 days of dry weather after the skunks are released. Skunks should be released in late afternoon and transported as far away from the road as possible. Bring a supply of dog food so that the skunks can have a food source until they find their own in the wild.

****In some jurisdictions it is illegal to care for skunks and you should consult your government wildlife agency.**