Best Management Practices

for Trapping Striped Skunk in the United States

ASSOCIATION *of* FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES

Figure SK1. Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are carefully researched educational guides designed to address animal welfare and increase trappers' efficiency and selectivity. The extensive research and field-testing used to develop BMPs are described in the Introduction of this manual. The evaluation methods used to develop BMPs have been standardized, enabling BMPs to be easily updated and revised as new traps and techniques become available. All traps listed in the BMPs have been tested and meet performance standards for animal welfare, efficiency, selectivity, practicality, and safety.

Trapping BMPs provide options that allow for discretion and decision-making in the field. Best Management Practices are meant to be implemented in a voluntary and educational approach, and do not present a single choice that can or must be applied in all cases. BMPs are the product of on-going work that may be updated as additional traps are identified through future scientific testing.

The Striped Skunk at a Glance

Characteristics

The striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) (Figure SK1) is a member of the Mephitidae family and is one of five species of skunks found in North America along with hooded (*M. macroura*), spotted (*Spilogale putoris and S. gracilis*) and hog-nosed skunks (*Conepatus mesoleucus*). The striped skunk is the most common of the skunks. The pelage of the striped skunk is characterized by a contrasting black-and-white color pattern. A white stripe is typically found along the back beginning at the head and nape and extending toward the base of the tail. On the striped skunk, a white dorsal stripe divides into two stripes at the shoulder blades, forming a "V" shape that extends to the base of the tail. The tip of the tail may also be white, but otherwise the remainder of the pelage is a lustrous black. Adult males are typically larger than females. Adults range from 4 to 14 pounds and measure 20 to 28 inches in overall length, including a bushy 7-10 inch tail. A highly developed scent gland is located on each side of the anus which produces an oily yellow, sulfurous compound composed primarily of thiols. The spray from these scent glands serves as a defensive secretion.

Range

The striped skunk is found throughout the United States, northern Mexico, and southern Canada.

Habitat

Striped skunks are habitat generalists and may be found in urban, agricultural, wooded, plains and desert areas. Preferred habitat is semi-open landscape consisting of an interspersion of woods and open areas. They are chiefly nocturnal. Den sites are generally located in wood or rock piles, ground burrows or beneath buildings.

Food Habits

Striped skunks are omnivorous and consume a diet that varies seasonally. They feed extensively on insects and grubs, but during seasons when these prey items are not abundant, skunks feed on small mammals, birds, eggs and vegetation such a fruit and grain. They also forage on crayfish, frogs, residential garbage and may even prey on domestic cats. Skunks search for insects by digging and by overturning small stones, dried cattle droppings and other scat. They have poor eyesight so food is located mainly by smell.

Reproduction

The breeding season for striped skunks generally occurs between February and April, with young being born in May. Females produce one litter per year and may give birth to their first litter at one year of age. The gestation period averages 63 days with delayed implantation occurring in females bred early in the breeding season. Litter size ranges from 5 to 9. Young are altricial and weigh about 1 ounce at birth. Eyesight develops by 2 – 4 weeks and hearing in the third week after parturition. Young are nursed for about 6 weeks and remain with the mother in a family unit until August or September when they disperse.

Populations

The range of striped skunks in North America has expanded. This range expansion is partly due to forested areas being cleared and the subsequent increase in open land, which is preferred habitat for skunks. Populations appear to be secure throughout the range. Striped skunks may become infected with rabies and are managed primarily for nuisance wildlife control. Fur trapping is also important in managing skunks and striped skunk pelts are always in demand by the fur industry.

General Overview of Traps Meeting BMP Criteria for Striped Skunk in the United States

Cage and bodygrip traps were tested for striped skunk (Table SK1). Examples, brief descriptions, and the mechanical details of the devices are given in the next section.

Table SK1. Overview of traps meeting BMP criteria for striped skunk in the United States.

Trap Category				
Cage	**Total Dimensions* Length x Width x Height**	**Door Size* Width x Height**	**Mesh Size*/Gauge**	
	32 x 10 x 12.75	10 x 12	1 x 2 12 gauge galvanized	
	24 x 7 x 7	7 x 7	1 x 1 12 gauge galvanized	
	Height of Trap Window*	**Width of Trap Window***	**Frame Wire***	**Spring Wire***
Bodygrip	6 – 6 15/16	6 1/16 - 7	3/16 - 1/4	3/16 - 1/4

* inches

Figure SK2. Proper strike location for bodygrip trap

Figure SK3. Setting tool

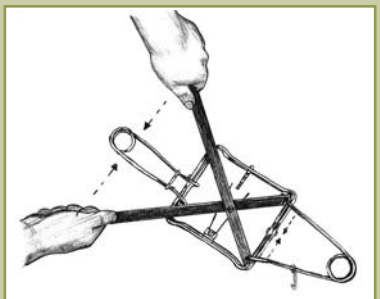

Figure SK3a. Using setting tool

Figure SK4. Safety gripper

Figure SK4a. Using safety gripper

General Considerations When Trapping Striped Skunk

Cage Traps

- Are bulky
- Require bait (single door traps)
- Can be used to capture several furbearer species
- Captures and holds animals alive, allowing for release
- Should be covered after capture to reduce spraying

Bodygrip Traps

- Should be placed so that the rotating jaws close on the top and bottom of the captured animals neck (Figure SK2)
- Trigger configurations may be modified, and tension-adjustable triggers are available to help improve selectivity
- Allows for use in locations and in weather conditions where other traps are less effective
- May not be appropriate in some areas because captured animals are killed by the trap

Safe Use of Bodygrip Traps

By design, bodygrip traps must close with considerable force to humanely dispatch and efficiently capture wild furbearers. This is particularly true of larger sized and "magnum" type bodygrip traps. As a result, users should take special precautions to avoid potential injury when using these devices. Trappers should be familiar with the safe and efficient use of bodygrip traps and these are best learned in trapper education.

A setting tool (Figure SK3) should be used to compress trap springs when setting large and magnum bodygrip traps. Use of a setting tool will not only make setting traps easier, it will make setting traps safer by allowing the trapper to keep hands and fingers away from the jaws (Figure SK3a). Most bodygrip traps are equipped with spring latches that hold each spring compressed, and the trapper should use these latches on both trap springs. A safety gripper (Figure SK4) should also be attached to the jaws when the jaws are moved to the set position (Figure SK4a). This will prevent the trap from accidentally closing. The above safety devices protect the trapper and make it easier to set, position and anchor the trap safely. Safety devices should be disengaged only after the set is completed.

If you are accidentally caught in a bodygrip trap you need to know how to free yourself. A setting tool is the most effective means to freeing yourself and should be used to compress the springs or jaws. You should always have a setting tool in reach when setting and placing bodygrip traps. In the event you are not able to reach this tool or use it with one arm, you should always carry a four-foot piece of rope with a loop tied on one end (a belt or boot lace could be used instead of a rope) in a pocket that can be easily accessed by either hand. You can use the rope to free yourself as follows:

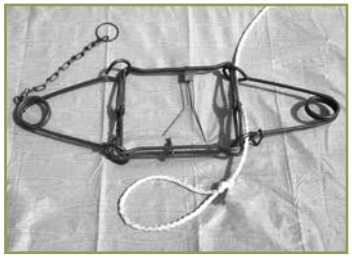

Figure SK5a. Step 1

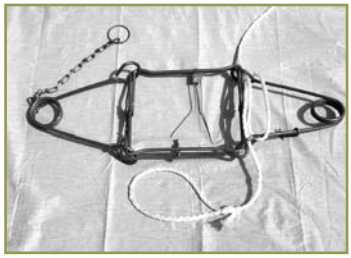

Figure SK5b. Step 2

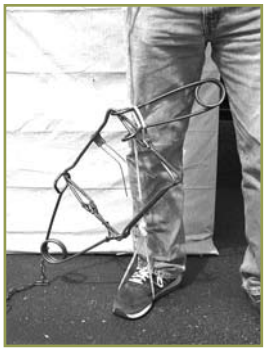

Figure SK5c. Step 3

1) Thread the rope through the eyes of one of the springs (Figure SK5a).
2) Bring the rope around and thread it back through the eyes a second time (Figure SK5b).
3) Place your foot in the looped end of the rope and pull the other end with your free hand until you can set the safety latch for that spring (Figure SK5c). You may need to do this to both springs to completely free yourself.

Specifications of Traps Meeting BMP Criteria for Striped Skunk in the United States

As more capture devices are tested and new information becomes available, they will be added to an updated list. Mechanical descriptions of tested traps are given as an aid to trappers or manufacturers who may wish to measure, build or modify traps to meet these specifications. Also, other commercially available traps, modified traps, or other capture devices not yet tested may perform similar to or better than the listed BMP traps. References to trap names are provided to identify the specific traps tested. The following list is provided for information purposes only, and does not imply an endorsement of any manufacturer.

Average mechanical measurements are rounded to the nearest $^{1}/_{16}$ inch. There may be up to $^{1}/_{8}$ inch variation in specifications among manufacturers. Manufacturers use recognizable names, such as "No. 2" coil-spring, to identify certain traps. However, there is no standardized system linking mechanical design features with trap size designations. The mechanical features of these traps are listed so that similar traps may be identified. The performance of anchoring systems was not specifically evaluated.

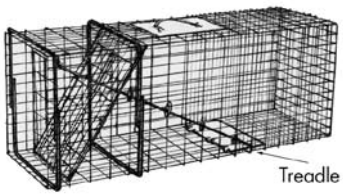

Figure SK6. Cage Trap

Cage Traps (Figure SK6)

Average Mechanical Description and Attributes

Cage material and mesh size: 12 gauge galvanized steel wire mesh, 1 x 2 inches
Cage size (length x width x height): 32 x 10 x 12.75 inches
Door size; single door (width x height): 10 x 12 inches
Weight: 14 pounds

Any trap that has similar specifications may be considered a BMP trap regardless of brand or source of modification, although performance information on all other BMP criteria (see "Criteria for Evaluation of Trapping Devices": Introduction pages 3-4) needs to be considered as well. The trap tested was the Tomahawk™ Cage Trap, No. 108.

Additional Information

- Selectivity features: Limited opening size and length restricts large animals.
- Special considerations for practicality: Multiple set options (baited sets; blind sets only with double doors); can be used for multiple furbearer species in same sets; large and easily seen (difficult to conceal completely); bulky – requires space for transport and storage; easy to operate – requires little training; can be used to transport captured animals (should be covered to reduce spraying); captured animals are easily released; continues to operate in freezing weather conditions. This device also meets BMP criteria for opossums, raccoons and gray foxes.

Average Mechanical Description and Attributes

Cage material and mesh size: 12 gauge galvanized steel wire mesh, 1 x 1 inches
Cage size (length x width x height): 24 x 7 x 7 inches
Door size; double doors (width x height): 7 x 7 inches
Weight: 5 pounds

Any trap that has similar specifications may be considered a BMP trap regardless of brand or source of modification, although performance information on all other BMP criteria (see "Criteria for Evaluation of Trapping Devices": Introduction pages 3-4) needs to be considered as well. The trap tested was the Tomahawk™ Cage Trap, No. 105.5.

Additional Information

- Selectivity features: Limited opening size and length restricts large animals.
- Special considerations for practicality: Multiple set options (baited sets; blind sets with double doors); can be used for multiple furbearer species in same sets; easily seen (difficult to conceal completely); bulky – requires space for transport and storage; easy to operate – requires little training; can be used to transport captured animals (should be covered to reduce spraying); captured animals are easily released; continues to operate in freezing weather conditions. Traps should be tuned often to insure that doors close simultaneously.

Bodygrip Traps (Figure SK7)

Average Mechanical Description and Attributes

Height of trap window: 6 inches
Width of trap window: 6 1/16 inches
Diameter of frame wire: 3/16 inch
Diameter of spring wire: 3/16 inch
Additional clamping bar: None
Safety features: Safety latches on springs

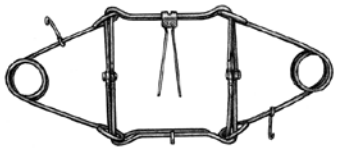

Figure SK7. Conibear™ Bodygrip Trap

Any trap that has similar specifications may be considered a BMP trap regardless of brand or source of modification, although performance information on all other BMP criteria (see "Criteria for Evaluation of Trapping Devices": Introduction pages 3-4) needs to be considered as well. The trap tested was the Woodstream Oneida Victor 160 Conibear™ bodygrip trap.

Additional Information

- Selectivity features: Small jaw spread limits access by most dog breeds; can be recessed in a cubby to increase selectivity. Proper setting techniques are best learned from trapper education materials or from experienced trappers.
- Safety considerations: Use of setting tongs, safety latches, and safety gripper is recommended.
- Special Considerations for Practicality: This trap also meets BMP criteria for fisher, raccoon, nutria, muskrat (submersion) and mink (submersion).

Average Mechanical Description and Attribute

Height of trap window: 6 15/16 inches
Width of trap window: 7 inches
Diameter of frame wire: 1/4 inch
Diameter of spring wire: 1/4 inch
Additional clamping bar: None
Safety features: Safety latches on springs

Any trap that has similar specifications may be considered a BMP trap regardless of brand or source of modification, although performance information on all other BMP criteria (see "Criteria for Evaluation of Trapping Devices": Introduction pages 3-4) needs to be considered as well. The trap tested was the Woodstream Oneida Victor 220 Conibear™ bodygrip trap.

Additional Information

- Selectivity features: Can be recessed in a cubby to increase selectivity. Proper setting techniques are best learned from trapper education materials or from experienced trappers.
- Safety considerations: Use of setting tongs, safety latches, and safety gripper is recommended.
- Special Considerations for Practicality: This trap also meets BMP criteria for fisher, raccoon, river otter (submersion), nutria, muskrat (submersion) and mink (submersion).