Smart Stuff with Twig Walkingstick

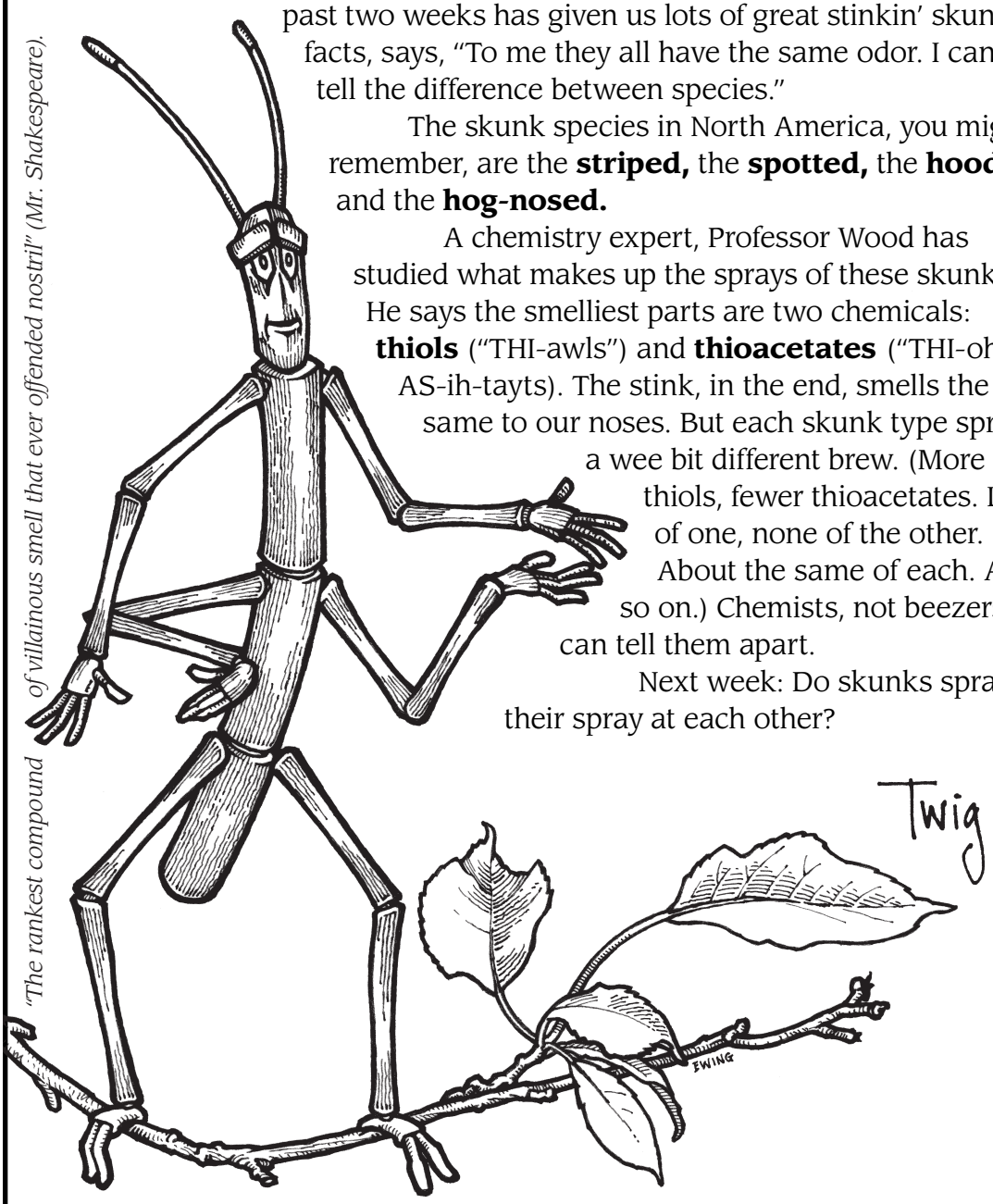
Q. Dear Twig: You said there are several skunk species. How do they smell? The same? Different?

A. It seems they smell **about the same.** Scientist Bill Wood, who in the past two weeks has given us lots of great stinkin' skunk facts, says, "To me they all have the same odor. I can't tell the difference between species."

The skunk species in North America, you might remember, are the **striped,** the **spotted,** the **hooded** and the **hog-nosed.**

A chemistry expert, Professor Wood has studied what makes up the sprays of these skunks. He says the smelliest parts are two chemicals: **thiols** ("THI-awls") and **thioacetates** ("THI-oh-AS-ih-tayts). The stink, in the end, smells the same to our noses. But each skunk type sprays a wee bit different brew. (More thiols, fewer thioacetates. Lots of one, none of the other. About the same of each. And so on.) Chemists, not beezers, can tell them apart.

Next week: Do skunks spray their spray at each other?



"The rankest compound of villainous smell that ever offended nostril" (Mr. Shakespeare).

From your scientific friends at The Ohio State University — specifically, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (www.oardc.ohio-state.edu) and OSU Extension (extension.osu.edu).

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For the week of April 1, 2007

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Notes: Part three in a four-part series on skunk spray that started out as only a one-part series but soon turned into a three-parts-longer four-part series after so much good stuff turned up. Non-skunk topics return in two weeks. (After part four of the four-part series, which follows, of course, part three of the series, which is, in fact, the part you're reading.) Robust thanks again to Bill Wood, Humboldt State University, Arcata, Calif., for sharing what he knows and smells!

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