

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick

Q. Dear Twig: So ... do skunks ever spray each other?

A. I've looked. And I've asked. And so far the answer, though cloudy, is this: Usually not. But maybe, once in a blue moon, sometimes.

Stan Gehrt, a skunk expert at Ohio State, says, "I conducted a six-year study on skunks, and it is true that **skunks rarely spray toward each other**, and they especially don't spray in their dens."

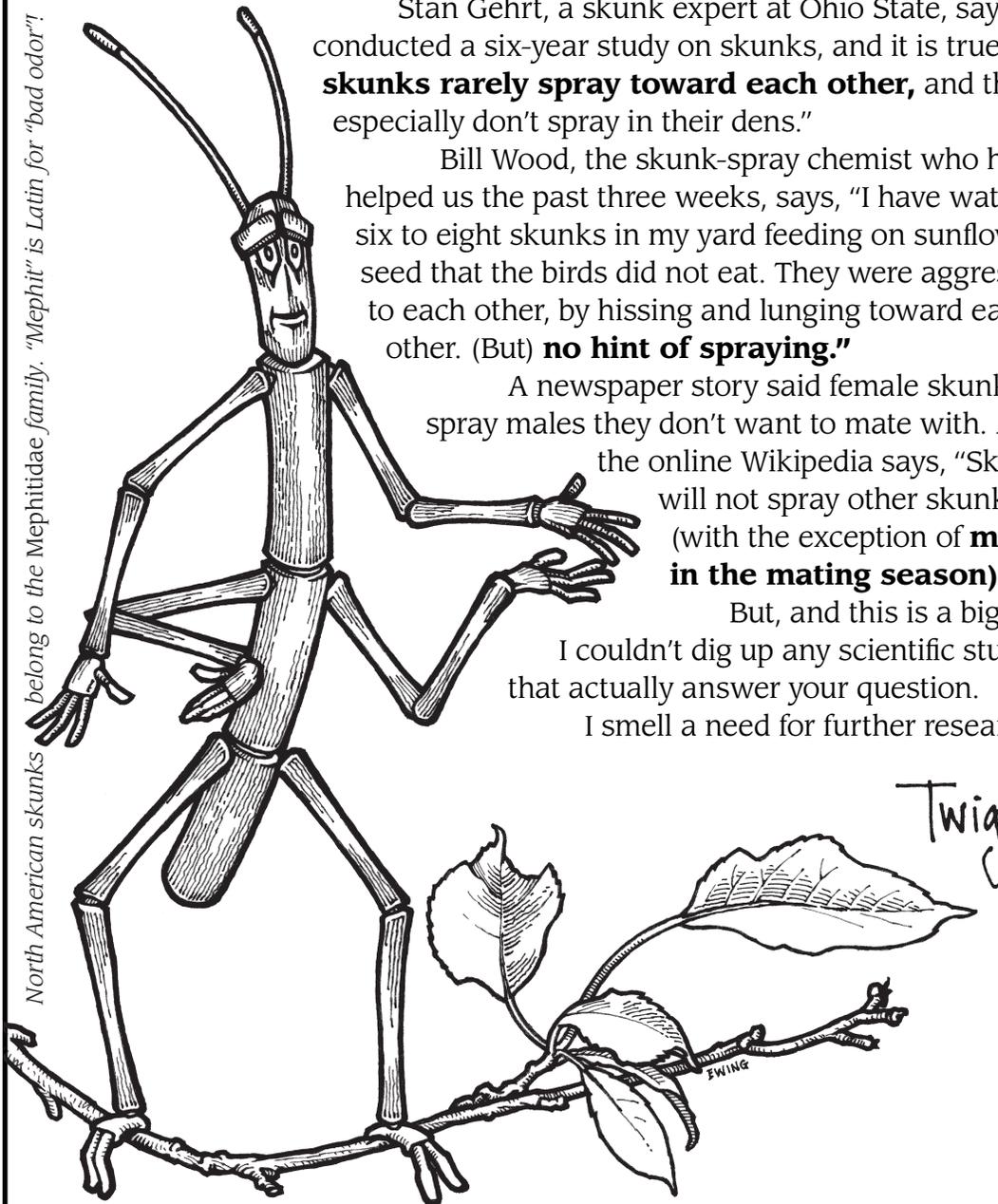
Bill Wood, the skunk-spray chemist who has helped us the past three weeks, says, "I have watched six to eight skunks in my yard feeding on sunflower seed that the birds did not eat. They were aggressive to each other, by hissing and lunging toward each other. (But) **no hint of spraying.**"

A newspaper story said female skunks spray males they don't want to mate with. And the online Wikipedia says, "Skunks will not spray other skunks (with the exception of **males in the mating season.**)"

But, and this is a big but, I couldn't dig up any scientific studies that actually answer your question.

I smell a need for further research!

North American skunks belong to the Mephitidae family. "Mephit" is Latin for "bad odor".



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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Notes: Stan Gehrt is an assistant professor in Ohio State University's School of Environment and Natural Resources. He studies raccoons and coyotes (especially in urban areas), too. Bill Wood is a professor of chemistry at Humboldt State University, Arcata, Calif. Find the Wikipedia mention under, yep, "Skunk." The newspaper story, in the *Dallas Morning News*, Feb. 14, 2006, cites Jerry Drago, research assistant professor, Department of Biology, University of New Mexico, and the organizer (not kidding) of the wonderfully named Drago Institute for the Betterment of Skunks and Skunk Reputations, <http://www.dragoo.org/>.

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