

Baird: The skunks are revolting

By Esther C. Baird/ The Baird Facts
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Let's discuss the skunks in Beverly shall we?

I've long wondered if our city isn't, perhaps, a Mecca of sorts for our striped friends. At least twice a week I am overcome by the eye-burning, throat scalding scent of fresh, closer-than-I-prefer, skunk. And it's not just the unfortunate, yet frequent, motorist-to-beast collision that creates the aroma. On multiple occasions this summer, my husband and I have been literally jostled out of bed by the wafting whiff of the Mephitis Mephitis - the skunk's Latin name that, in the true Latin form of stating the obvious, means bad odor. Barring smoke from a fire, I had never imagined an actual scent waking me up. But this summer, here in our fair city, there seems to be a revolution on hand.

My suspicions were furthered when, on a regular outing with my daughter to Lynch Park, I noticed hastily written signs warning us to "Beware of the Skunk." surrounded the rose garden.

Growing up two of my dogs found themselves at the receiving end of a cranky skunk. The first time it happened the vet told my mother that out we should dig a hole and bury our dog for eight weeks. We assumed he was kidding, except it probably was the only thing that would have really stopped the stink. The second time, our dog managed to run through our house post-spray. As a result, from April through October whenever it rained, we were all reminded of that day.

I couldn't imagine dropping my daughter off at preschool and saying, "Sorry it's a rainy day, here's a nose plug." So we beat a hasty retreat out of the Rose Garden.

I mentioned my skunk-invasion theory to a group of my girlfriends and they instantly agreed, each with their own skunk story. One girlfriend relayed that when they moved into their home it smelled ... skunky. They cleaned it, and did all the standard things that are supposed to help - but never really do, when finally she insisted her husband rip out a section of floor where the smell was most concentrated. So her 6'1" husband squeezed into the crawlspace under their room and began pulling the floorboards off. My friend said she then heard a sound like the 'scream of a woman' when a skunk, in an advanced state of decay, fell from the flooring onto her husband's head. I think we can all agree that the only thing more rank than a live skunk is a decayed skunk that has been stewing in your floorboards.

To get to the bottom of all this, I called the Beverly Animal Control Hotline. While I wasn't able to reach the Animal Control Officer, the woman who answered the phone did offer that quite a high number of calls regarding skunks had come in this summer. She then informed me that, "You can't move a skunk because there is a \$500 fee."

I assured her that should I encounter a skunk, even if they paid me the \$500, I wasn't about to move it. She agreed that was wise, but said I'd be surprised how many people try. Those, I imagine, are people we'd be well advised to steer clear of on rainy days.

Finally, I called Lynch Park to learn more about those mysterious rose-garden signs. The lady who answered this phone, like my girlfriends, was enthusiastic about the topic. "Last winter my family had to move out of our house because of skunks! Exterminators came and removed 11 of them from beneath our home! Can you imagine?" Truly, I could not. To hear these stories you just know that here in our Garden City we have a brazen, surfeit of skunks.

She then transferred me to Park Director Bruce Doig and he told me the story of the skunks in the rose garden. As some of you may recall, those signs appeared around Homecoming. They were the result of a park ranger happening upon a skunk sleeping in one of the bushes. Bruce said in droll understatement, "Skunks are cute, but a nuisance." With said nuisance in mind, they put up the signage. No sooner had the signs gone up than the skunks of the garden relocated to beneath the porta-potties set up for the Homecoming crowd. When the staff went to remove the porta-potties, the startled skunks ran right into the unisex bathroom and let loose with their special brand of communication assuring that the unisex bathroom may be an unused bathroom for quite some time.

My verdict is in. Beverly is a beacon for the Pepi Le Pews of the region. Guard your rose bushes, floorboards, and restrooms. The revolution is underway.

Esther Baird is a Beverly resident. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen. If you have any suggestions or comments about The Baird Facts, please contact her at: esclaw@hotmail.com