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Grazing Skunks Running Amok

By Doug Hallett
News

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Rob Seberras has a smelly problem, namely a lot of skunks in his south end neighbourhood, and he's frustrated by how little can be done about it.

"They're grazing like cattle on the grubs on the lawns," he says, blaming the city for the new pesticide bylaw that he says makes it harder to control grubs.

"I've never seen it as rampant as this, never," said Seberras, who lives on Munroe Crescent in the Clairfields subdivision north of Clair Road. "But they've got lots of food now with the grubs, so it's a feast . . . you can watch them going from lawn to lawn at night."

Seberras says he worries about skunks spreading rabies, and he's unhappy about his two dogs being sprayed by skunks more than once this year when let out after dark.

"It's not a nice thing to have your dog sprayed when you let it out at night," he said Wednesday.

He cleans the dogs up with a mixture of peroxide, baking soda and dish detergent. "We tried tomato juice, which we'd heard about. It works, but not as well" as the other concoction, he said.

Seberras was on the phone this week to the Guelph Humane Society, to a wildlife control company and to city hall, and he didn't like what he was told.

"I can hire pest control for my whole neighbourhood, I guess," he said. "There are no skunks living in my yard. They come to my yard at night."

Skunks are commonly seen in his neighbourhood in the evening, especially when it's time for weekly garbage pickup, he said in an interview after contacting the Tribune.

"It's very bad. The skunks are running around in twos when you drive around the neighbourhood."

Seberras, a local resident since 2001, said he thinks Guelph should trap and remove wildlife from residential properties, as Mississauga used to do when he lived there many years ago.

However, the owner and president of the wildlife control company that Seberras talked to this week, after being referred to it by the Guelph Humane Society, says the province's Fish and Wildlife Act now forbids the trapping and relocating of wild animals.

If trapped, animals including skunks have to be released within one square kilometre, and they'll just come back, said Bill Dowd of Hamilton-based Humane Wildlife Control.

"The bottom line is urban wildlife are in our cities and they are here to stay," said Dowd, who described his firm as the largest wildlife control company in Canada, with animal control technicians stationed in Guelph and many other cities.

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Skunks are susceptible to rabies, but people shouldn't be too concerned about this, Dowd said in an interview Wednesday. If a skunk is rabid "you would know it," he said. "It would be out in broad daylight staggering around."

A bigger concern, he said, should be a type of roundworm found in skunk and raccoon feces. It can cause blindness and even death, and it's being blamed in the recent blinding of an 18-month-old Hamilton child, he said.

People who have skunks or other unwanted wildlife living under their decks or sheds or elsewhere on their property should hire a wildlife control firm to install protective screening, Dowd said.

He also advised that people should put their garbage out in the morning, rather than the night before, to avoid attracting hungry wildlife to the vicinity of their homes.

Not much can be done about skunks or other wildlife roaming a neighbourhood, where it might have five or six den sites, Dowd said, but there are a couple of things that can be done to keep them off your property.

One simple option, he said, is to install on lawns a "motion-sensor sprinkler." It sprays water briefly when activated by wildlife after dark. The element of surprise, the sound and water keep them off your property, he said.

A more complicated option is to install a small electric fence on a lawn - two wires connected to posts. It's operated using a timer so that it comes on at night when wildlife is about, not during the day when there are kids and pets about, he said. This device gives a mild shock to wildlife intruding on a property and keeps them away, he said. "It definitely works."

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