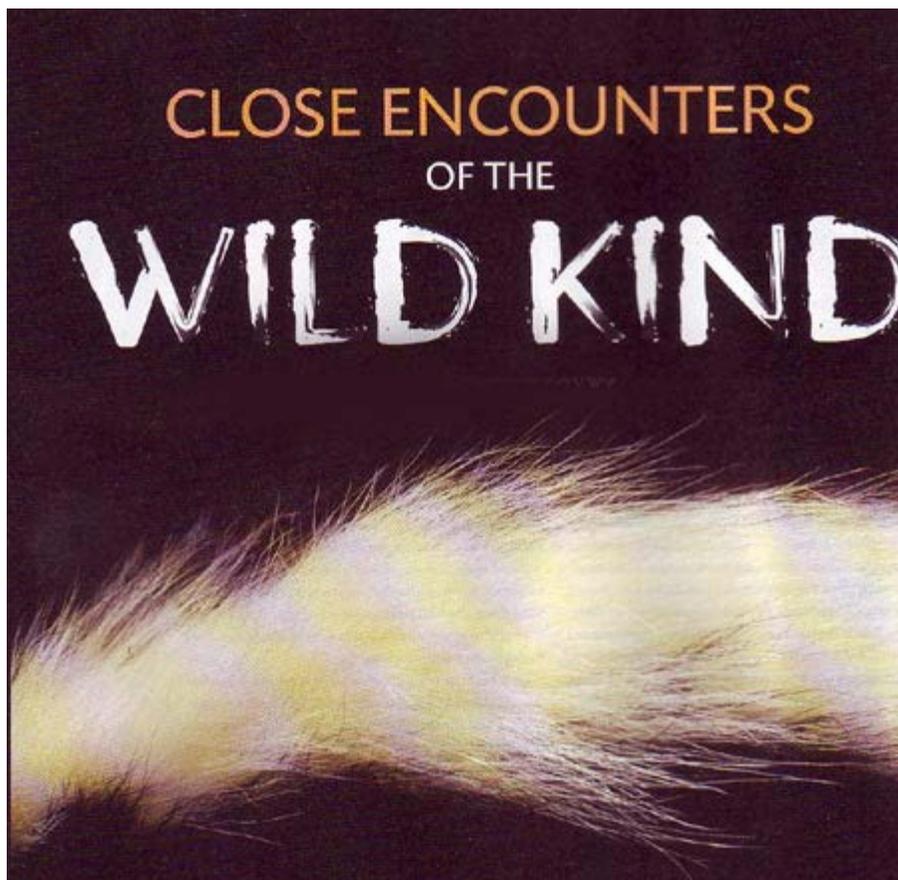


Close Encounters of the Wild Kind

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Dogs playing in the bush may encounter more than great smells. They can be cut by sharp branches, pick up ticks or run into unsavoury critters. While only a few dogs ever face a serious threat from a bear or cougar, many more encounter skunks and porcupines.

Porcupines are slow-moving creatures that are easily cornered by curious dogs. Several dogs together are more likely to attack a porcupine because their excitement causes a frenzy, triggering a charge.

Fortunately for the porcupine, but unfortunately for dogs, these rodents have an effective defence system. As soon as a dog sinks its head into a porcupine's quills, they stick in the dog's skin and are pulled off the porcupine. Most end up in the dog's face, muzzle and mouth.

Quills are modified hair shafts that are white with black tips. The white part is hollow; the black part solid and sharp. Small barbs on the black part prevent the quill from backing out. In essence, these barbs ensure quills move in only one direction – deeper into the tissue. Once through the skin, quills can migrate just about anywhere in the body.

The quills should be removed immediately. In a five-year study at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (Saskatoon), encompassing 296 incidents of dogs with quills, those treated more than 24 hours after the attack were five times more likely to have complications than dogs presented to the hospital within 12 hours of the incident.

Abscess-formation in the skin close to the original quill injury was the most common complication. Quills reaching an eye caused significant damage and those that migrated into or around joints caused lameness. The study showed that the longer the quills were embedded, the further and deeper they travelled. Quills even migrated to internal organs like the heart and spinal cord.

Dogs must be anaesthetized for quill removal, which needs to be done with great care to avoid breaking a quill. Most dogs are given antibiotics to prevent infection, as well as painkillers to quell their discomfort. Owners need to closely monitor their dogs after quill removal. If a bump appears, it should be investigated.

Skunks have a much different way of protecting themselves from exuberant dogs – anal-scent sacs that contain foul-smelling, sulfur-containing chemicals (likened to rotten eggs, garlic and burnt rubber).

By contracting the muscles surrounding its scent sacs, a threatened skunk can accurately spray scented fluid 10 feet, and can spray up to five times before emptying its sacs. Once drained, it takes up to 10 days to replenish the supply of anal-sac fluid.

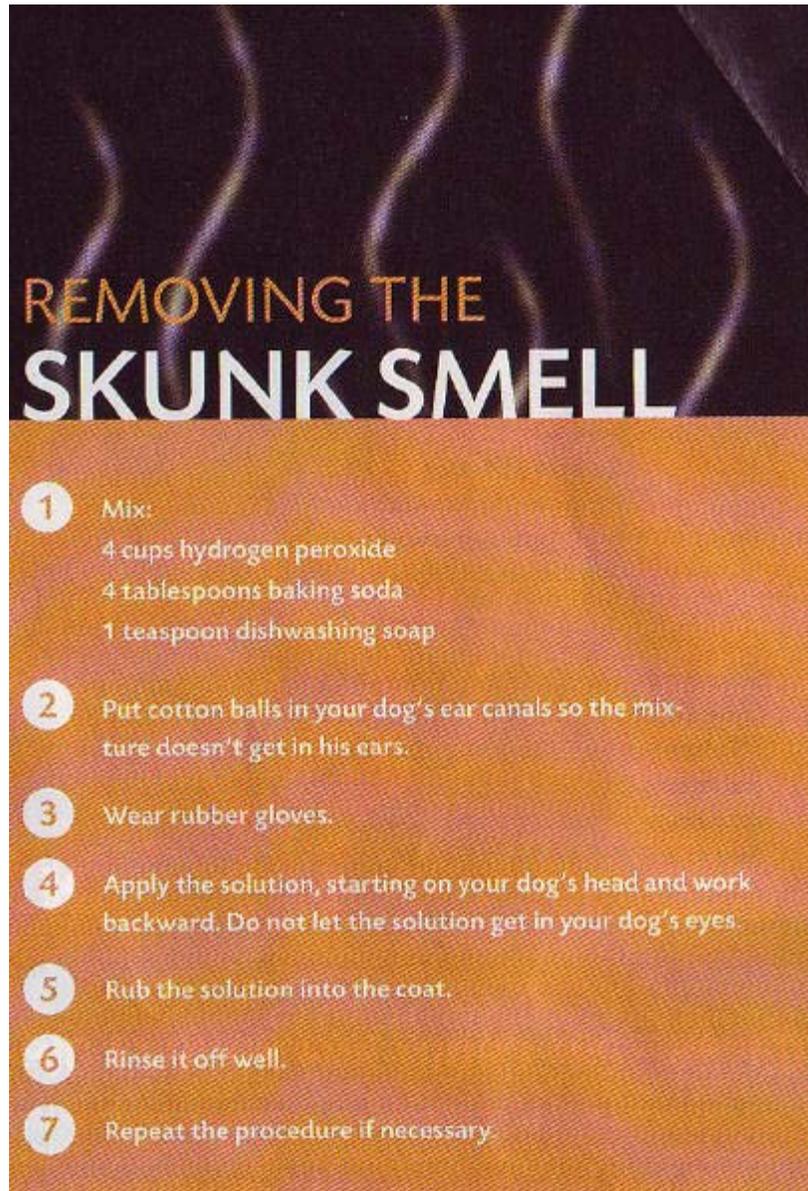
As a general rule, a skunk is reluctant to spray and tries to scare away an attacker by raising its tail, hissing and stamping. If posturing fails, the skunk will release its liquid. The fluid doesn't cause any health problems – the only issue is its odour.

The favourite home remedy for skunk spray – tomato juice – works somewhat, but can leave a persistent odour and turns white fur a pale shade of pink.

The most effective anti-skunk remedy is a combination of hydrogen peroxide, baking soda and liquid soap. The baking soda boosts

the oxidative ability of the peroxide and helps dissolve the scent-sac liquid in the water so it can be washed off with soap.

Do dogs learn from their mistakes? Evidently, not! There are many reports of repeat porcupine and skunk encounters. Though dogs don't know any better, their owners should. It's up to humans to keep their four-leggeds out of harm's way.



REMOVING THE SKUNK SMELL

- 1** Mix:
4 cups hydrogen peroxide
4 tablespoons baking soda
1 teaspoon dishwashing soap
- 2** Put cotton balls in your dog's ear canals so the mixture doesn't get in his ears.
- 3** Wear rubber gloves.
- 4** Apply the solution, starting on your dog's head and work backward. Do not let the solution get in your dog's eyes.
- 5** Rub the solution into the coat.
- 6** Rinse it off well.
- 7** Repeat the procedure if necessary.