

THE BROAD-STRIPED SKUNK.  
(*Mephitis hudsonicus* Rich.)

By NORMAN AND STUART CRIDDLE.

The subject of this article, including its various races and relations, covering the continent, has a reputation that none will envy and few appreciate until they come into actual contact with the animal in its vicious moments, when, closely pressed and in danger of death, it gives forth that fetid odor for which it is notorious.

In modern times it has become an instinct to consider that the name skunk implies an animal wholly obnoxious, and in consequence the name itself has become synonymous of all that is odious and depraved. The impression arrived at is, of course, due to lack of knowledge combined with the far too common practice of exaggeration. We hope in this little sketch to dispel some of these notions and to prove by the narrative that although the odor is very real, it is not necessarily a part of the animal's every-day life.

The Broad-striped Skunk was, in days gone by, a common mammal in Manitoba, and at our home at Aweme its numerous encounters with coyote, dog and probably owl, often impregnated the air with an unsavory odor which was far from pleasant. As time went on, however, conditions changed and constant persecution greatly reduced its numbers, so that to-day we have but a remnant of what went before, although the animal seems to be holding its own fairly well in the less-settled districts.

There are few handsomer mammals than skunks in this part of the world, and of the whole genus few, if any, equal the species under discussion. Unlike the eastern animal its stripes of white along the back are broad and prominent and show up strikingly in contrast to the black. In addition, it has a large white patch at the back of its head and a narrow stripe down the nose which often varies sufficiently to enable one to be separated from another; besides this there is the magnificent tail which almost wholly hides the back when held over it. Skunks in many respects are not unlike weasels; this is particularly so of the head, but the body increases in width towards the tail in such a manner as to give the animal a wedged-shaped appearance when viewed from above. In gait they are clumsy. The walk is a wobble, and in running they gallop. They are by no means fast in movement and it seems that the immunity afforded by the terrible weapon of self-defence has been to some extent acquired at the expense of speed, or possibly with such a weapon speed is no longer necessary.