



# California Wildlife Center

## Patient of the Week

**August 26, 2022**



Photo by Brittany Moser



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### **Rat Traps Catch More Than Just Rats**

Skunks have been in existence for over 11 million years and have evolved to be opportunistic feeders. They will eat almost anything that is easily accessible. In the wild skunks prefer to eat small animals (reptiles, amphibians, rodents), insects, and plants. When they coexist alongside human populations, they will often take advantage of unsecure trash cans and pet food that has been left outside overnight. Skunks are naturally curious and spend most of their waking hours foraging for food. Unfortunately, with the existence of rat traps, not all food that is left outside is safe for skunks, or other wildlife, to consume.

This was the case for one juvenile male skunk who was unintentionally caught in a rat trap. The trap snapped onto his front left paw, and the skunk scampered off. Eventually the animal was trying to exit from beneath a house and the trap got stuck, immobilizing the skunk. It was very lucky that a member of the public saw the situation and was able to safely dislodge the trap from under the house and bring the skunk to our facility.

When the skunk was assessed by hospital technicians, they noticed that there was an infection in the injured foot, and there was significant trauma to the digits. Wound care was provided, and the patient was administered strong pain medications, anti-inflammatories, and antibiotics. X-rays were taken of the injured foot, and it was confirmed that one of the digits (equivalent to the pointer finger) on the left front foot needed to be amputated.

Skunks are generally tenacious, and this animal was no different. After the surgery the patient was persistently attempting to chew at the bandage on his front paw. To protect the injury, hospital staff created a custom head collar. The patient was assessed twice a day, and after a few weeks his injured foot is almost healed. He will soon be moved to an outdoor enclosure.

The struggle with rodent infestations has been an issue for humans since the development of agriculture. The best way to control invasive rodent populations is to remove the items that provide them with food, water, and shelter. Here is a short list of things that can be done to help prevent infestations:



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- Hire a for-profit wildlife exclusion organization that can assess buildings and secure areas where rats and mice are entering the home.
- Do not feed pets outside or remove all food each night.
- Place a sheet under all bird feeders and clean up shells and seed pieces each night.
- Keep trash cans tightly covered.
- Keep yards tidy and remove piles of detritus that can be used as shelter.

Traps that are left outside are incredibly dangerous for all kinds of wildlife, and poisons are detrimental to the ecosystem. Coming together with neighbors to help remove the items that support invasive rodent populations is an important step in minimizing infestations and keeping all wildlife safe and healthy.

If you find an injured skunk it is best to contact your local wildlife rehabilitation center or for advice. Although these animals can be safely contained, it is best to do so under the guidance of professionals.