

# GETTING TO KNOW WILDLIFE

## A SKUNK WITH ATTITUDE



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This young skunk was orphaned when his mother, uprooted by construction, dropped him when startled by a truck. Because he was just a few weeks old, with eyes still closed, he hadn't acquired the defensive posture common to baby skunks and quickly adapted to his caregivers at the Centre as substitute moms.

Homer, as he was dubbed by staff, would firmly grasp the bottle of formula in his forepaws while resting his chubby back feet on it for leverage. Baby skunks are quite adorable with soft-as-velvet pads for feet and an attitude that exudes confidence.

As soon as his eyes opened, he started the play/practice routine of lifting his tail high and forming a perfect U of his body to aim his 'lethal weapon'

at pretend opponents. He would stamp his feet and then slide each one gracefully backwards looking like Michael Jackson doing the moonwalk.

Because it was some weeks before other baby skunks came into the Centre, Homer developed a 'spoilt only-child attitude'. When introduced to the others who were smaller than he was, he was a total brat. He stomped aggressively and circled the three who were huddled together for protection, squealing at them and aiming his little bum with serious intention. It was quite hilarious to see this baby skunk throwing a temper tantrum like a three-year old in a toy store.

However, within a few days, they were best of friends, playing and sleeping on top of one another although Homer was definitely the leader of the pack – partly because he was bigger but mostly because of his confident attitude.

When it came time to take

them on nightly walks to learn the ways of the wild, the smaller skunks would follow him in a single line and he would follow me as I was still considered the mother of the tribe. Living on a country property, we were able to meander across fields, lifting rocks in search of slugs and investigating logs in the woods for edible delicacies.

A neighbour who would sometimes see us on these outings would call out "it's Mother Superior and the Sweet Sisters of Charity", given their black and white habits. Goodness knows what he said behind our backs.

At the end of summer, it was clear the skunks were ready to go out on their own. One warm evening, we simply left the cage door open and off they went. Occasionally we'd spot them around the property. Homer, because of his size, was easy to pick out but he didn't venture near which was the way it should be.