

## Western spotted skunk (*Spilogale gracilis*)



### Taxonomy:

Family Mephitidae (formerly included in Mustelidae). Also called polecat or hydrophobia cat. Formerly grouped with the eastern spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*). Ten subspecies are recognized, including *Spilogale gracilis saxatilis* from the region.

### Description:

Likely to be confused only with the larger Striped skunk, but distinguished from that species by the complex pattern of broken white lines and spots.

Total length: 320-581 mm; Tail: 85-203 mm; Hind foot: 38-47 mm; Ear: 22-28 mm; Weight: 200-900 g.



### Distribution:

Occurs from the central Great Plains west to the Pacific coast, and from southwestern British Columbia south to Central Mexico including the Baja Peninsula. Low to mid elevations along the Wasatch Front.

### Ecology and diet:

Spotted skunks are common throughout the intermountain region, particularly in foothills and canyons at lower elevations where they prefer rocky, riparian areas. They generally den in burrows or in openings in rock outcrops. The diet consists mainly of small vertebrates, insects, and other invertebrates.

They are active at night, and although they

aren't true hibernators, they are much less active during the winter. The well-developed anal scent glands are effective deterrents for most mammals. However, large owls and other birds of prey are important predators.

### Life History:

Mating occurs in the fall, and following fertilization there is a 6 month period of delayed implantation and arrested development. Embryos implant and resume development in early spring, and 2 to 6 young are born after about 1 month. Young are weaned at about 2 months. Captive animals may live more than 10 years.

**References:** Zeveloff 1988; Verts et al. 2001.