

MAMMAL SECTION

SKUNKS AT PLAY

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Seldom do city people have the opportunity to watch the playful antics of young wild animals. All too often, the first sight or scent of man send them scurrying in terror out of sight. So it was with pleasure that we welcomed the invitation of friends to visit a family of half-grown skunks they had seen playing the previous evening.

Their home was dug into the bank below the road level where tall grasses screened the entrance. From our vantage point just above them, we had a perfect view. Slightly before sunset one of the parents entered the den not to be seen again. About the same time two young emerged from a wheat field to cross the intervening grassy area leading home. They proceeded sedately in single file, their plumed tails waving gracefully.

All was quiet for a time until one emerged to follow a winding path down to the edge of a pool, the sole remnant of a stream that flowed under the bridge later to empty into Wascana creek. There he slaked his thirst with a long drink of water. Once when a forepaw went through the scum of plant life, he drew it out quickly to shake off the water. Shortly, a second one followed the exact course of the first to the same spot for a drink. A little later the third and smallest took the identical route of the others for his evening drink.

Thus revived, the two smaller skunks promptly engaged in a rough and tumble rollick like a couple of kittens. Soon one was on its back waving both front feet in the air. If one walked away the other sidled up and nipped it repeatedly for all the world like a small boy cuffing another into combat. Occasionally, they would sense something on the road in our direction and pause with heads thrown back to sniff the air while their tails went up at the same time. Reassured that all was well, they would tangle once more and roll about or work off their excess energy by digging frantically for a minute only to stop and turn to some fresh form of amusement. Meanwhile, cars passed back and forth each one shaking the bridge, but they were unheeded by the skunks while none of the passengers seemed sufficiently curious to see what was attracting our attention.

The third and largest skunk was less interested in play than the smaller ones, but much more interested in food. With nose close to the ground he was on the move in search of nourishment, around the pool, under the bridge, down to the former streambed, up again through the grass where only the white stripes on the back showed level with the grass tops. He worked farther and farther afield, stopping now and then to nab some grasshopper or other insect.

So we left them in the early darkness, one venturing alone into the world, the other two still rollicking together close to the home den until they, too, might feel the pangs of hunger sufficiently to go foraging.