

# A TASTY TREAT



by Lenore Andrew, Milltown Cross, P.E.I.

Insects form a large part of a skunk's diet; however in fall, late winter and early spring native insect populations are relatively unavailable. So, what could a lucky skunk find more delightful than some hives of honeybees that are being kept year round!

After trapping a few pesky skunks last fall in our apiary, all seemed well until late January when skunk trails were found leading to - guess where! During winter many of the bees die from old age and other natural causes; consequently there are lots of dead bees around outside the hives. These bees served not only to attract the skunk(s) but also seemed to satisfy his hunger without him bothering the colonies.

Later in spring and in early fall skunks can become a serious pest to the bee colonies. They can drastically reduce the number of bees which the beekeeper counts on to collect nectar. As well, by disturbing a colony night after night the bees may develop nasty tempers which are displayed to all intruders including the beekeeper.

How can a skunk survive a foraging attempt on a hive much less eat the bees, you wonder? Scientists have studied this and found that skunks can have hundreds of stings in their mouths and on their heads and bodies and yet they still come back for more!

How do these creatures accomplish meal preparation? They simply go to the hive during dusk to daylight hours when the bees are all inside and begin pawing at the entrance. This of course brings forth numerous angry bees. Not in the least frightened, the skunk rolls the bees with his paws to make them more manageable before gobbling them up.

While outsmarting a skunk is a nuisance to some beekeepers on P.E.I. we are more fortunate than beekeepers in other provinces who must also deal with bears.

Skunks are not the only creatures which take advantage of the dead bees surrounding wintering colonies. Chickadees in the area gather round for a feast as well.

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SLIDE CONTEST WINNERS. The May meeting of the society featured the showing of the slides submitted to the annual nature photography contest. Entries were judged and prizes presented by local photographer George Wotton. First prize was awarded to Winifred Cairns for a picture of drooping sedges. Second went to Mrs. Mary Cairns of Lower Freetown for a swallowtail butterfly. Anne Landry placed third with a shot of a killdeer at the nest. Fourth was a winter scene at Springton taken by Winifred Cairns.