

I spoke too soon. Or, more accurately, I wrote something last week that came back to haunt me.

A few days after I wrote an essay about the “skunk kit,” an incident occurred that made me very glad we had the assembled goods and didn’t have to go out to a store to buy them. We have not been making any unessential visits to retail establishments. Sheep minerals and organic chicken feed account for most of our ventures to the outside world.

I heard Blue and Kate bark during the night before the unwelcome incident. And, when Runo released them from their house and kennel the next morning, they did not obediently come into the yard and on into the cabin to greet me—their usual morning routine.

Instead, they shot away, through the pasture gate and on into the Maple Tree Field. It was useless to call them at this point. Their hearing ability decreases accordingly with the strength of the temptation.

The Maple Tree Field has grass more than waist high. And, on that dry, sunny morning, there was a very heavy dew. Runo went on to turn the sheep into the daytime pasture, and I stood by the gate and waited. After a short time, Blue came running back to me. As soon as she was close, I realized what the lure had been. She smelled moderately strongly of skunk.

I put her back in the kennel just as I heard Kate barking far off in the field, somewhere, I think, in the vicinity of the big maple tree that gives the field its name. Runo was on the way back by then, and we both called Kate. She came, not at all concerned that she, too, was unusually fragrant.

We left both dogs in their kennel and went ahead with our morning chores. When we finished, I grabbed the leash in one hand, the skunk kit pail in the other, and snapped the leash on Blue’s collar. She was happy to go, thinking, I suppose, that we were going to the barn where there were two cows, two calves, and three rams. But, instead, we stopped outside the milkhouse, and I tied her to the grain tank that stands on a concrete pad there. Runo hooked the hose to the warm water, and I opened the skunk kit pail.

Blue does not like a bath and seldom has had one. She has her own way of keeping herself tidy. First—she gets wet in the dew. Then, she patrols the fence between our yard and the horse pasture on two sides and the milk cows’ lot on another. This is, of course, a warming exercise, so she then jumps into the small pool by the woodshed. Once upon a time—before Blue and Kate—I had a little pump in the pool that circulated the water, making a nice gurgling sound and providing a good summer home for frogs. I did not use the pump last year, because it became obvious that the pool was Blue’s swimming hole. Kate never goes in. Blue stays very clean.

While Blue was busy trying unsuccessfully to avoid her bath, Kate was back in the kennel howling because she didn’t know where Blue was. I ignored her pleas.

When Blue was clean and no longer had much of a skunky aroma, I took her back to the kennel and fastened Kate to the leash. She smelled marginally more strongly than Blue.

Kate didn’t like her bath, either. She, too, keeps remarkably clean by her

own doggy methods. But, after I was thoroughly wet, both from the skunk kit ingredients and the rinse water, Kate, too, had submitted to a bath. Both dogs were confined to their kennel until they were dry.

So, the “skunk kit” method works quite well. But, I would rather not have occasion to use it again.

A skunk was not the only wildlife that took up our time this week. We have had something eating the leaves of anything in the cabbage family—though, only on a couple of beds. Most of the cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts are covered with a light floating row cover to protect them from the cabbage butterflies that lay their eggs on the leaves. Nothing had disturbed the covered plants.

We were most suspicious that the consumer we were feeding was a woodchuck. We had had some trouble in a corn patch last summer, and that time, we couldn't blame the damage on raccoons. And, there was a big hole by the garden fence where some critter had made its entrance to the vegetable patch.

We borrowed a live trap yesterday, thinking we might try that a few nights to see if we could catch the animal. We baited the trap with delectable fresh cabbage leaves from plants in the greenhouse that will become feed for the pigs. I picked the most succulent leaves and jammed them into the little tin can that served as a supper dish for whoever might come along and enter the trap.

This morning, after barn chores, we went to the garden to see if anything had been there. In this case, something was still there. In the trap were a mother woodchuck and two children. They were so cute that it seemed a shame that they couldn't become pets, but we knew that was, of course, out of the question. We re-located them to a nice hillside with water close by. They will have no trouble finding food there, but there won't be any more cabbage. It will be interesting to see if the trap is empty tomorrow morning or if we will have to make another trip to reunite a family.