



CASCADE SUMMIT

NEWS FROM CASCADE FERRET NETWORK VOL. 7 ISSUE 2 / SPRING, 2006

Network Status Update

Who We Are

The Cascade Ferret Network (CFN) is different from traditional ferret shelters: instead of housing the ferrets in a single place, the CFN depends upon a network of qualified foster homes, each of which cares for only a few ferrets at a time. This network approach to sheltering ensures our foster ferrets receive the highest possible quality of care. You can reach the CFN at (503) 231-0887 or www.cascadeferret.org



Ferrets

During January, February and March 2006, CFN took in 26 ferrets and found new homes for 9 ferrets; one of which was through a referral. Long time shelter resident Natasha passed away after a last resort effort to save her through surgery in hopes of stabilizing her insulinoma. Surgery seemed to be the only option as she was no longer responding to her medication. Natasha had a wonderful life being spoiled by both her foster parent and her sponsor who had sent her gifts on several occasions.

Veterinary procedures during the 1st quarter of 2006 included one neuter, one adrenal surgery, and four insulinoma surgeries. Four of the surgeries involved biopsies and one procedure was done to repair a torn eyelid. There was one dentistry

and a total of seven lupron injections, which were given to alleviate symptoms of adrenal disease. The CFN currently has 44 ferrets in the network.

Financial

Income from donations, the sale of merchandise, and fees from adoptions help to pay for the veterinary costs of the Cascade Ferret Network. The CFN relies on contributions to pay for food, bedding, litter and other expenses such as phone and utility bills. The following is a preliminary summary of the revenue and expenses for CFN during the first quarter of 2006.

1st quarter 2006

Revenue

Adoption fees.....	\$435
Donations (Cash).....	\$4,858
<u>Merchandise profit.....</u>	<u>\$40</u>
TOTAL.....	\$5,333

Expenses

Vet/medical costs*.....	\$2,171
<u>Other.....</u>	<u>\$907</u>
TOTAL.....	\$3,078

(*Veterinary balance currently \$2,700)

Helping Hands

Volunteers

The backbone of the Cascade Ferret Network is our team of devoted volunteers. The CFN's high standard of ferret care is only possible because of our foster parents and volunteers.

One of the most rewarding ways to help the CFN is to provide foster care for CFN ferrets. A foster parent takes one or more ferrets into their home and cares for them as they would their own pets. The CFN is responsible for the ferret's medical costs and will provide a cage as well as other accessories. Some foster ferrets are short-term residents who may need a little extra time to

recover from surgery or who are waiting to receive their vaccinations before they are placed into a permanent home. Other foster ferrets need extra attention to help them recover from a neglectful or abusive home -- these kids need anything from extra feedings each day to lots of handling and love to get them past problem behavior. (i.e. biting)

Another way to help out is to volunteer. There are lots and lots of opportunities for those who would like to contribute their time. Whether it's helping out at public events or assisting the organization to help it run more smoothly, ALL CFN volunteers are greatly needed and very much appreciated!

Donations

The Cascade Ferret Network is a 501(C)(3) non-profit corporation, so your donations may be tax deductible. Donations towards the veterinary bill can be made directly to Southwest Animal Hospital. Call them at (503) 643-2137. Their address is: 6139 SW Murray Blvd, Beaverton, OR 97008.

Donation Acknowledgement

CFN is grateful to the individuals that donated supplies during January, February and March of 2006. *Rebecca Bogorad* donated a case of facial tissues to one of our foster homes for ferret accident clean up.

The only item appreciated as much as the donation of time or supplies is the donation of money! *Petsmart Charities* sent a \$322 check from donations made through the Giving Tree fundraiser at the Vancouver Petsmart during the holidays. *Brad Holt* donated \$1,000 which was matched by his employer, *Autodesk*. *Bryan & Nancy Lipsy* donated a similar amount over the last year which was matched by their employer, *Microsoft*. Other individuals that make regular generous donations through payroll deductions are:

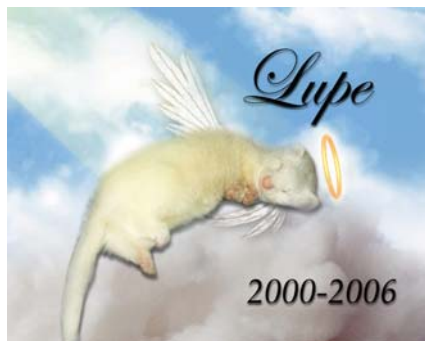


Andrew & Ingrid Heckt, Ross & Jennifer Bachman, and Keeli Adams.

The following individuals made generous donations of cash to CFN during the 1st quarter of 2006:

Rebecca Bogorad, Anna Wellborn & Mike Eadie, Laura Satterfield, Valarie Couchon & Robin Micherone, Rhonda Kennedy, Alice Garofaro, Lisa Nobealani, Katie Hansen, Nancy Winter, Chris Christian, Mary Robeson, Julie Andrecka, Ann Lynde, Mika Gentili-Lloyd, and Dee Holmes. An anonymous person donated a percentage of their eBay sales to CFN through missionfish.

There were several donations made to CFN during the 1st three months of 2006 in memory of special ferrets that have crossed the rainbow bridge:



Tiffini Mueller made a donation in memory of *Lupe*, who was the ferret companion of her coworker, *Rachel*, at *Dove Lewis Emergency Clinic*. *The staff of the North Portland Veterinary Hospital* made donations in memory of the beloved ferret companions of staff members *Nancy Winter* and *Heather Besse*. *Nancy* lost *Nigel*, a paraplegic ferret she adopted through CFN and to which she gave many years of quality companionship. *Heather* tragically lost her young ferret *Kipling* during

a surgical procedure. *Floyd Carley* made a donation in memory of *Tucson*, a special shelter ferret adopted by *Elayne Barclay* who crossed the rainbow bridge in the 2005 year and was featured in the spring issue of the newsletter.

Event Reports

Northwest Pet & Companion Fair April 22 & 23, 2006

The Cascade Ferret Network had a booth at the fair again this year. The CFN booth was just a few booths down from one for the Lane Area Ferret Lovers. This is a ferret shelter in Eugene. It was their first time at the event. They made regular visits to the CFN booth to check out the ferret playpen. Not surprisingly, they had not brought any ferrets with them from Eugene for the event. They donated one of the cozy fleece bags they were selling for the playpen ferrets, who quickly initiated it by curling up inside it. Thanks need to go to the volunteers that staffed the booth (*Jennifer Fresta, Elayne Barclay, Kelli Carlson, Lavon Grabn, Heather Daniels, Teresa Kaminski, Aurora Paulsen, Sandy Striet, Gil LeCren, and Tom Gerde*) and especially the ferret volunteers that sacrificed their bodies to being touched and handled by hundreds of curious humans (*Hufflepuff, Annie, Malia, Menebuni, Cappuccino, Latte, Violet, Daffodil, Chunky Monkey, Twerp, Quincey, Sherman, Eugene, Hazel, Hobo, Padme, Anakin, Isabelle, Annabelle, Chaya, Anya, Otter and Banjo*).



Health Matters

Respiratory Disease in the Ferret Part II

Katrina D. Ramsell Ph.D, DVM

Other viral causes of respiratory disease

Canine Distemper Virus

Canine distemper virus is another virus that can cause respiratory disease in ferrets. Although canine distemper can initially have signs that are similar to the flu, distinct differences between the two diseases appear within a few days, and their outcomes are very different. Whereas influenza generally resolves on its own, canine distemper is almost always fatal in ferrets.

Canine distemper virus is a contagious disease caused by a paramyxovirus. Several families of mammals can contract the disease, including Canidae (e.g. dogs, coyotes, foxes and wolves), Mustelidae (e.g. ferrets, mink, weasels, otters and badgers) and Procyonidae (e.g. raccoons, coatis and kinkajous). Canine distemper is a prevalent viral disease in unvaccinated dogs and neighborhood raccoons. Ferrets are susceptible to the disease when they are unvaccinated and are exposed to an animal carrying the virus or when they come in contact with infected material such as shoes or clothing.

HELP CFN AND SAVE A TREE

The *Cascade Summit* newsletter is being offered in an electronic format (Adobe Acrobat) with color photos. If you are willing to give up getting a hard copy sent to you, please let us know and give us your email address. We will notify you via email when the next issue of the newsletter is available online.

The CFN will keep all email addresses private and never provide the list to any other organization for any reason.



You can bring the virus home and infect your ferret after visiting a pet store or walking in the woods or local park. Canine distemper virus has been shown to live for at least 20 minutes on clothing, but the virus can be destroyed by disinfectants, detergents, heat and drying (e.g. run clothing through the drier for at least 30 minutes). Ferrets can also contract the disease if they receive a canine distemper vaccine that is not appropriate for ferrets. Appropriate canine distemper vaccines stimulate an immune response (without actually causing the disease) which can protect a ferret if it is then later exposed to the virus.

Although signs of canine distemper virus are variable, the disease usually initially results in mild eye irritation and clear nasal discharge. A high fever often develops within a few days and an infected ferret usually becomes lethargic and loses its appetite. Discharge from the eyes and nose often becomes thick and yellowish-green, and the eyes may become matted shut. A prominent sign of canine distemper is a red and swollen appearance to the skin around the lips, chin, and anus. This often progresses to thick, orange-tinged crusting, and the foot pads frequently become very thick and hard. As the disease progresses to later stages, the ferret may exhibit other signs such as wobbliness, a head tilt, odd behavior and seizures. Some ferrets with the disease die from brain damage. Canine distemper virus suppresses a ferret's immune system, resulting in overwhelming secondary bacterial infections, severe respiratory symptoms and eventually death.

Diagnosis of canine distemper is made based on a ferret's symptoms and a history of exposure of an unvaccinated ferret to the virus. There is no known treatment for this disease and ferrets with canine distemper almost always die. Having

your ferret properly vaccinated against canine distemper is the best way to prevent your ferret from contracting the disease. Ferrets should be vaccinated starting at 8 weeks of age and should continue receiving vaccinations every 3-4 weeks until 14 weeks of age. If a ferret is over 14 weeks of age, or if the vaccine history of the ferret is unknown, the ferret should receive two vaccinations 3-4 weeks apart. All ferrets should be revaccinated on an annual basis. Three distemper vaccines are commonly used for ferrets: Fervac-D (United Vaccines, Inc, Madison, WI), Purevax (Merial, Athans, GA), and Galaxy-D (Schering-Plough Animal Health Co, Omaha, NE), with the first two being USDA approved for use in ferrets. Fervac-D has been used for quite a few years in two large U.S. ferret breeding facilities. As of January 2006, United Vaccines, Inc. will cease production of Fervac-D. You may want to discuss ferret vaccine protocols with your veterinarian. You can also contact the American Ferret Association for current vaccine recommendations.

Aleutian Disease Virus

Aleutian disease virus can sometimes cause respiratory symptoms in ferrets. This is a contagious disease in ferrets and is caused by a parvovirus. Aleutian disease was first reported in mink in the 1940s. Although the mink virus can infect ferrets, at least three other strains of the virus have been documented in ferrets. When the virus is present, the body makes antibodies to try to fight off the virus; forming antibody-virus complexes. Deposition of these immune complexes in various organs results in clinical signs, such as: progressive weight loss, hind end weakness or paralysis, tremors and respiratory disease. Aleutian disease is suspected based on a ferret's history of exposure, clinical signs and a high blood globulin level. A definitive diagnosis can be made

based on a positive blood test combined with a high globulin (gamma) level or characteristic histopathologic findings.

Many ferret shelters routinely test new arrivals for the Aleutian disease virus. Although there are a few different methods for testing a ferret for the disease, one blood test often used by shelters (the counterimmunoelectrophoresis test (CEP or CIEP) - United Vaccines, Inc., Madison, WI) that has been shown to be an effective method for identifying ferrets with antibodies to Aleutian disease, will no longer be available after January 2006. Another type of test, known as an ELISA test, is currently available for testing blood and saliva samples (Avecon Diagnostics Inc., Bath, PA), but there are no studies published about the specificity or sensitivity of the tests in ferrets. The presence of the antibody in a ferret is not necessarily diagnostic of the disease, as some surveys have indicated that ferrets can be antibody positive without showing signs of Aleutian disease. There is currently no vaccination available and no definitive treatment for Aleutian disease virus. Although testing and removal of infected animals is considered a way of controlling the disease in some shelters, some individuals and shelters handle the situation differently; for example they may confine ferrets that test positive for the disease to isolated areas or specific "Aleutian disease positive" households. Research is ongoing to facilitate our understanding of this complex disease.

Warning Signs

There are several indicators that a ferret is having difficulty breathing, such as: coughing, choking, rapid and shallow breathing or deep breathing. A ferret experiencing difficulty breathing that also has muddy brown or bluish gums (which



indicates poor oxygenation to tissues) should be considered an immediate emergency. A ferret that is coughing up blood or has blood coming from the nose should be seen by a veterinarian immediately. Do not administer anything orally to a ferret that is having difficulty breathing. Your pet could inhale the substance into its lungs, making the condition worse.

A ferret with an object obstructing its trachea (windpipe) may initially panic and run around or paw at its mouth. It may lose consciousness as oxygenation to the brain decreases. If the ferret does lose consciousness, open its mouth to look for the obstructing object. Avoid lodging the object farther down and making the situation worse, or being accidentally bitten. A ferret in this situation requires immediate medical attention. Note: Sometimes ferrets breathe oddly and/or paw at their mouth if they have a piece of food stuck in the roof of their mouth. They may require a little assistance to dislodge the piece of food, however care must be taken to avoid being bitten.

Prevention and early treatment of disease is key

Keeping your ferret current on recommended vaccinations and practicing good sanitation habits will help prevent your ferret from contracting contagious diseases. It is important to observe your ferret on a daily basis and to be aware of common signs associated with respiratory conditions. Being able to recognize that your ferret is suffering from a respiratory ailment will help you better care for your pet. A ferret knowledgeable veterinarian should be contacted if you have questions or concerns regarding your ferret. If you suspect your ferret is ill, you should take it to your veterinarian as soon as possible for an examination.

Just For Fun

The Trouble with Twerp

By Kelli Carlson

As a ferret owner of eight or so years, I have had the pleasure of having many things stolen from me by my beloved ferrets. Most of the time it is very cute and endearing and nothing is stolen that is critical to my everyday life, so I carry on until the item turns up. Enter Twerp. Suddenly, my whole life changed as far as my personal items were concerned. Twerp was brought to me by my cousin. She had a friend who had a ferret but got a puppy and no longer had time for Twerp. I felt terrible for this little guy; and even though I really didn't need another ferret, I told her to bring him to me. He was only 8 months old and came flying out of his cage with a mission: TROUBLE! I had thought of changing his name, but it really just fit him. He was a reddish colored ferret and when you held him and messed up the hair on his little head he really did look like a "Twerp".



Living in the 21st century, I have long since left behind my land line phone and only use a cell phone. It works very well for me... except for when I loose it. Well, one morning I received a phone call that woke me up. After the call, I ate breakfast, made another call, and by then the ferrets were up and out of their cage. I did my usual routine and got down and played with them. Three hours later, I decided to make a phone call to my work to tell them I

could work extra if they needed me. Okay, so I did it again; I had obviously misplaced my phone. Knowing I hadn't left my house, I felt pretty good about not having to worry about my phone being lost in public. Okay, fine.... retrace my steps. Where was I when I last had my phone? I started looking. An hour later, still no phone! I was getting a little worried, because it just didn't make any sense. I absolutely had not left my house, so it just had to be there! As I tend to keep my house pretty clean, there was no clutter, so where could it be? I looked in drawers, cupboards, under the sofa and chairs, I even looked in the refrigerator and freezer (just in case), and still no phone. Please someone call, I thought, but of course, when you want them to call, no one does. I looked for another hour, but still no phone. I checked the ferret room in case I took it in there when I went to let them out. Maybe I left it on top of the cage? No luck. This is ridiculous!, I thought to myself. I turned the chair and sofa upside down; shook them; but no phone. I ran upstairs, took all the pillows and sheets off my bed; shook them, and once again, no phone! Panic was really starting to set in. What did I do with it!? All of a sudden, a flashback....

I thought back to last summer when I had lost my purse. I had everyone at work looking for it as I had been pretty sure I had last seen it there. I called lost and found, security and all the other departments (there are a lot of those) and no purse was found. In defeat I went home and thought about all the calls I had to make to cancel everything. No, I decided I would give it one more day (just in case). This may have seemed foolish, but I just couldn't believe that I had lost an entire purse. The next day, as I was walking by my bed, five little noses suddenly come out at my feet, as if trying to keep me away. Hmm? Obviously there was something



under the bed I was not supposed to see. (Of course I had to look.) MY PURSE!! Everything out of it and scattered under my bed as well as five little bodies apparently very upset that I had found their newfound treasure. I am pretty sure it was Twerp who got the purse there. More incriminating evidence was, that not long before, he was caught trying to carry a small bag of potatoes across the room when I had brought home some groceries.

Then I remembered that less than a week ago, I had noticed Twerp "eyeing" my phone. I had been down on the floor playing with the ferrets, my phone at my side, when I spotted Twerp trying to "scoot" off with my phone. He didn't get far, but it planted the seed in his mind. He wanted it and I wouldn't let him have it; all the more enticing. Twerp is patient and looks for opportunity. He would wait, it would happen again.

Okay, so Twerp most likely took my phone. I could handle that. I knew where his hidey holes were, so checking them seemed to be the next step. An hour later, after checking all known hidey holes several times, there was still no phone to be found. I needed serious help, but I obviously couldn't use my phone. Then I noticed my computer. How long would it be before anyone I know checks their e-mail? Honestly, probably not long. I have a lot of friends who work on computers most of the day so surely they would check their e-mail quite frequently. I put out a mass e-mail for help! "Please someone call me, this is killing me!" I started to think, would I ever see my phone again? Suddenly the ring of the T-mobile chimes. MY PHONE! Where was it coming from? No way, it was coming from under the AQUARIUM! What the heck? I hadn't been near it all day, but Twerp must have. The aquarium sits slightly away from the wall and I could see that the stand was open.

The ringing was coming from there, in a corner, under a net; I was finally reunited with my phone! My friend Misty had called me after reading my plea for help. After thanking her profusely I hung up and immediately sent out another set of e-mails to avoid getting multiple calls throughout the day. As I hung up my phone I noticed tooth marks on the leather case. I was positive I hadn't put those there. Ahha, the evidence was there! The marks had to have been made by ferret teeth.

Once again a ferret gets away with a crime that can only be proved by circumstantial evidence. I knew which one was responsible, but I was unable to prove my sweet Twerp committed yet another crime. Off the hook once more, free to plot another offense. What will be next?

Kindred Species by Elayne Barclay

Long-tailed Weasel



Photographed by William Kinney in his alfalfa field in Christmas Valley

I had just gotten home from a long day doing shelter related work. I had left Portland at 7:30am with my vehicle stuffed with merchandise, displays and educational material along with a couple of "ambassador ferrets" to spend the day in Corvallis at a Pet Day event put on by OSU's School of Veterinary Medicine. After spending the day interacting with the public I then drove further south to meet Marie Siemer in Eugene to pick up Princess Pixel, a ferret she had retrieved from an animal control agency in Humbolt, California and

had been caring for in Grants Pass for a couple of weeks. I finally got home at 7:30pm and got Princess set up in a quarantine cage when I checked the CFN voice mail. There was a message from a guy named Bill in Christmas Valley that had what he thought looked like wild ferrets in his fields and he was hoping I could help him figure out what they were. I was pretty certain he didn't have domestic ferrets out in his field, so I decided that a return call could wait until the next day. I called Bill and he said someone else had gotten back to him already and had told him the animals he had seen popping their heads up out of gopher holes in his fields, which are no where near any water, were mink. That sounded highly unlikely to me, so I asked what color they were, and the first thing he said made it clear he had been given bad information, they were most definitely NOT mink, but weasels. He emailed some photos and I was able to tell that these were long-tailed weasels. He was writing up an article on his weasel sighting for a tourist publication, so I said I'd write up a paragraph about their natural history. It was fun to find that my books had descriptions of long-tailed weasel behavior that any ferret owner would recognize. The domestic ferret is in the same genus as the long-tailed weasel, so they are fairly closely related. Below is the information I wrote up for Bill.

The long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*) is a member of the mustelid family which includes mink, otters, and wolverines. This species is found throughout North America. It is a beautiful chocolate brown above with a white abdomen and chest and a black tip at the end of its tail. An adult male can reach 18 inches including a tail that is 6-7 inches long (proportionately longer than the smaller, but similar looking short-tailed weasel). Weasels are solitary carnivores with long cylindrical bodies and are known for being persistent in their pursuit of prey.



Their extremely lithe and flexible bodies allow them to squeeze into any burrow into which they can get their heads. The long-tailed weasel is known for being active during the day in areas without any protective vegetation whatsoever. They are very fast and will tackle prey of equal size or even larger than themselves such as pocket gophers, ground squirrels and rabbits. Contrary to folklore, they do NOT drink the blood of their victims, but they will kill more than they can eat at one time and stash uneaten prey for future. They live in the modified burrows of their prey and often have a latrine area indicating their presence with lots of their characteristically twisted stool. They can be fearless around humans or larger animals. An irritated or excited weasel will "bottlebrush" its tail (the tail will be twice its size because all the fur is standing straight out-as seen in Bill's photo), stamp its front feet, hiss and release strong-smelling musk from its anal glands. We have seen all of these behaviors with the related domesticated "weasel" we rescue (pet ferrets). The enemies of the long-tailed weasels are predators larger than the weasel, coyotes, owls, hawks and domestic dogs. I'm sure a fair number are hit by cars as well. They have a short life span of about 2 years. The population of the long-tailed weasel fluctuates every 4-7 years. Babies are raised from mid-April through June.

~ CFN WISH LIST ~

- *Volunteers
- *Bleach
- *Canned a/d
- *Canned w/d
- *Stamps
- *Copier paper
- *I.V. pump
- *Litter
- *Ferretone
- *Foster homes
- *Quarantine homes
- *Boxes of facial tissue
- *Monetary donations
- *Quality digital camera
- *Laundry detergent (scent and dye free)
- * Gift certificates to office supply stores

Updates

New Sponsorship Categories

CFN began its sponsorship program in 2002. The purpose of the program was to let people make a connection with a specific shelter ferret by helping to pay for that ferret's veterinary care. In return for the sponsor's donation, they would receive exclusive "behind-the-scenes" stories and photos of their sponsored ferret on a quarterly basis for one year. Ferrets in the sponsorship program have been those unlikely to be adopted and those with some sort of health issue that required more veterinary care than other ferrets in the shelter. The program has been very successful, but the \$60 fee to sponsor a ferret barely begins to cover the annual veterinary costs associated with any long-term shelter ferret. Many people choose to sponsor a ferret that is likely to be adopted or does not have any particular medical costs. To address these issues, the Board of Directors of CFN has decided to expand our sponsorship program. There will now be two levels of sponsorship available. One level, referred to as an "Intake Sponsor", will address newly arrived ferrets or ferrets that have no health problems and are more likely to be adopted. Their \$30 sponsorship fee will cover the initial intake costs of being tested for ADV as well as being fully vaccinated for distemper and rabies. The sponsor will be listed on the web page as being that ferret's intake sponsor and will get a one time packet with photos and information about "their" ferret and will be notified when (hopefully) the ferret is adopted. The other level of sponsorship, referred to as a "Special Needs Sponsor" will address those ferrets with outstanding health issues and each ferret can have multiple sponsors. For a \$60 donation, each sponsor will be listed on the web page as one of the sponsors of that

ferret and will get quarterly updates on the condition of the ferret for one year.

CFN Adoption Fee Assessed

CFN recently assessed the organization's adoption fees which have not changed even though the costs for the services we provide have significantly increased over the years. The revised adoption fee for ferrets under three years of age is \$95 and for ferrets over three years of age it is \$80. The new discount on the adoption fee for a bonded pair is \$30. The adoption fee is still a very good deal since to get a ferret tested for ADV, properly vaccinated for canine distemper and rabies, and examined by an experienced vet would cost most people well over \$100. Most ferrets in pet stores cost at least \$100 and none of the procedures included in the CFN adoption fee are provided.

CFN Foster Parents

Thanks to the following individuals that provided foster care from January to March:

- Kelli Carlson:** Irish
- Karen Kloeck:** Truffle & Candy
- Debi Currier:** Tempest & Calaban, Oscar & Calvin
- Jennifer Fresta:** Mr. Green Jeans, Cappuccino & Latte
- Katie Hanson:** Barnaby & Bart
- Carla Almaraz:** Tattletail
- Lavon Grahn:** Padme & Anakin, Possum, Zima, Sophie, Big Bear, Zoey, Hobo, Chaya & Anya
- Darlene Johnson & Mike Darnell:** Sally & Neil
- Rebecca Bogorad:** Natasha, Violet & Daffodil
- Chris & Amy Christian:** Zest
- Katie Poppe:** Maggie
- Marilou Chamberlain:** Penny, Sheba & Amber
- Elayne Barclay:** Willow, Hillary, Annie & Baby, Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, Boomer & Mindy
- Malia Norris:** Smokey, Menehuni & Malia
- Aurora Paulsen:** Otter & Banjo



Quality of Life

Enrichment: Adding Random Variability (Or not, or Sometimes) by Bob Church*

Random variability is nothing more than varying the times and days of specific events, such as feeding and exercise times, giving treats, taking walks, play time, etc., as well as the events themselves. The idea is to create a situation that is not so structured as to allow the ferret to “predict” when something is about to happen, and acts more like a natural environment where events occur randomly. The reason this is so important is because it stimulates the ferret to take a more reactive role within their environment. For example, if a ferret knows they will be fed a favored food each time a whistle is blown, they will associate the sound of the whistle with the treat. This is extremely effective if you want to train a ferret to respond to whistles (I do, but more on this later), but when it happens for EVERY activity, all you are really doing is teaching a ferret to ignore their environment. In highly structured environments, ferrets adapt to specific activity periods, leaving the remainder of their schedule empty. Sleeping, stereotypic behaviors, or just getting into trouble generally fills this empty time, and the ferret loses interest in their surroundings. This is a phenomenon of ALL animals: if the environment is “sterile,” that is, insipid and characterless, then little interest is paid, turning it into a “gray wall.” New objects stand out in such an environment like colored balls on a monotonous gray landscape. The reason for this is simple: a predator doesn’t want to waste time searching areas that are not going to produce food, but ALL new objects have a high potential of providing a meal. In a memorized landscape, they

stand out. This is even true of many humans; I can immediately recognize if someone used my desk because of the displacement of objects, NOT because I am anal-retentive, but because the environment is changed. The phenomenon applies to timed events as well, but the times between events become part of a monotonous “timescape” of little interest to the ferret. Introducing novelty to break up the monotony is a good idea, but if time-structured, the monotonous “timescape” STILL exists. The best solution to this problem is to RANDOMLY introduce novelty and other enrichments, not just in terms of objects or situations, but timing as well. The difference in a ferret’s interest in their surroundings can be remarkable. They are far more alert because they never know when or where something interesting is going to happen. Because the monotonous timescape has been broken by randomly introduced enrichments, the ferret is far more interested in their surroundings than when entrenched in a structured schedule. Some people point out a dog or cat LIKES a structured day, BUT they are hardly locked in a cage most of the time. Even with a structured day, a dog can interact with novel objects within their environment, with their owner, or with other animals (and species of animals) if they are present. A ferret locked inside a cage hardly has such opportunity, making the need for randomly applied enrichments all the more important.

How can you break up a structured schedule? Vary the times and the length of time a ferret is out of their cage. Don’t get set into the “two playtimes a day” rule, but some days toss in a few extra play times. When applying an enrichment program, don’t lock into specific times, but randomly vary the schedule so the ferret cannot predict when something will happen. This not only applies to time, but also to

enrichments as well. Don’t get locked into an “it is Tuesday, so that must mean novelty enrichment” state of mind. Take your entire suite of enrichment programs, and not only vary the time they are given, but the exact enrichments as well. You can make the schedule more random if you write each enrichment on a slip of paper, and then draw one a day from a hat. You don’t have to be so random with times; just varying the time of an event by a few hours will be sufficient in most cases. Making enrichment novel or random is great, but how long does it take a ferret to become bored with your wonderful idea or toy? All too often, a ferret will run over to a new toy, sniff them, many interact with them for a while, and then walk away, showing NO interest in the object again. The problem is the ferret is TOO smart; simple situations or basic toys can become boring faster than a ferret can find a corner to poop. Ferrets are very intelligent and so they need complex enrichments. Intelligence and complexity go hand in hand.

*Reprinted from the Ferret Mailing List, June 2003

CFN Ferret Sponsors

Thanks to the following individuals that provided financial support by sponsoring a shelter ferret

- Anna Wellborn & Mike Eadie** (Possum & Annie)
- Clyde Prince** (Hillary & Zima)
- Crystal Johnston** (Natasha)
- Peter Muhlhausler** (Maggie)
- Rebecca Bogorad** (Willow)
- Laura Satterfield** (Willow, Big Bear)
- Kathleen Pallari** (Barnaby & Bart, Irish)
- Fran Harris** (Tattletail)
- Fiona Merrill** (Sophie)
- Zack Watson** (Olympus)
- Dee Ann Holmes** (Hobo)
- Floyd Carley** (Hobo)
- Ann Lynde** (Zest)
- Sean Borst** (Violet)
- Mika Gentili-Lloyd** (Mr. Green Jeans)



Ferret Champions

To be a champion can mean more than one thing. A champion can be an advocate or defender, or someone that does battle for another's honor. A champion can also be someone that shows marked superiority. In this column I am going to focus on a person that is a ferret champion in all of these respects. The champion in this issue of the Cascade Summit is **Nancy Winter**



With Sammy (sable) & Maddi (blaze)

When a wonderful little ferret found her about six years ago, Lavon (featured in a previous issue as a Ferret Champion) did the logical thing. She called her vet to ask what to do with him. He said, "I don't know much about ferrets, but my tech Nancy is the one you want to talk to". He put Nancy on the phone and Lavon's life was changed forever! Nancy is a fountain of useful information; the best possible mentor you can imagine. She is by nature a bashful, quiet person, but when you get her talking about ferrets, she turns into someone with Star power!!

Nancy Winter decided to acquire her first ferret eleven years ago. She knew she wanted to get one after attending a ferret event in the Portland area, but unlike many people, she waited an entire year and

did lots and lots of research before gratifying her desire to have a ferret of her own. She was also unusual in acquiring her first ferret from a shelter rather than walking into a pet store to get a baby ferret. Nancy became involved in volunteering with the Cascade Ferret Network six or seven years ago when she became a foster parent to three wonderful girls: Bonnie, Lena and Weeble; and she took care of them for the rest of their lives. They were very lucky girls. She has a soft spot for the special needs ferrets that need extra TLC. Because of her vet tech background, when CFN took in a paralyzed ferret, I approached her to be his foster caretaker. He needed to have his bladder expressed several times a day and special accommodations to give him a good quality of life and I knew Nancy could provide that. She ended up adopting him before too long and took him on trips and to work with her for years. Nancy has also helped CFN by creating wonderfully cozy and adorable hammocks and sleep sacks for the shelter ferrets and for us to sell. Because of her vet tech experience, CFN is very lucky to have her help at our fund raising events where we typically offer health checks.

When asked what she enjoys most about having ferrets in her life she stated, "The things I enjoy most about ferrets are their joyful enthusiasm for life & their playful, silly antics, their assertiveness & curiosity and most of all THEY ARE SOOOOOO CUTE!!! Oh yeah & I love the way they smell! For me there is not a down side to having ferrets." One of the things people think is a downside to ferrets- the amount of cleanup they need - is not an issue for Nancy: "I love to clean up ferret cages/messes!"

Nancy's biggest challenge is keeping the number of pets in her family to a manageable number. "I love being a mommy and get that urge to rescue another ferret quite

often but I have to stop myself because my time and energy are finite. I have 5 ferrets, 2 cats, 2 dogs, 3 grown human children and one husband".

Nancy is passionate about obtaining ferret health knowledge. She is constantly learning about how to take better care of her pets, what to feed them and how to keep them healthy. She has attended veterinary conferences and gone to ferret shows and events all over the country. She stated, "For people who want to do more to help ferrets, educate yourself all you can about ferrets then spread that knowledge around. Donate time and/or money to shelters and ferret medical research. The most important thing everyone can do to be a better ferret caretaker is educate yourself. Ferret medicine is evolving quickly and there is lots of outdated information printed about ferret husbandry and medicine. I want every ferret owner and veterinarian to realize the importance of providing ferrets with access to a completely DARK sleeping area to protect the adrenal glands and to feed a diet appropriate for an obligate carnivore."

When asked for a favorite ferret memory to share, Nancy thought of her recently departed Nigel, "One of my favorite memories is of a very special little ferret named Nigel. Nigel's back legs were weak from an injury he received before being turned into the shelter so he walked different and had a very special, adorable "Dance of Joy". After holding him for awhile, when I set him down, he would jump up and down on his front legs and then start rolling sideways around the room. It was the cutest thing ever and makes me smile every time I think of it."

I hope CFN will be blessed with Nancy and other Ferret Champions like her for many years to come! If you want to become a Ferret Champion, contact CFN (ferret@cascadeferret.org or 503-231-0887) about volunteering.



Ferret Stories

Each quarter we'll relate the tale of a ferret or two who overcame adversity to find a better life. We would also love to have updates on ferrets once they have found a home, so send us photos and stories!



Padme

Anakin



Padme and Anakin's Story

Because of health reasons, Padme and Anakin's owner could no longer give them the attention they deserved. They arrived in November of last year when they were both three years old. Although they came together, they are no longer a seriously bonded pair. Anakin is a handsome, mellow, sable boy who loves his "all alone with my human" time, yet plays with everyone else who approaches him. He is just a big lump of love, and is pretty well content with whoever will stop and play, be it human or fellow ferret. He will walk up to an open door and without hesitation step right out to see what's out there where he's never been before. He doesn't even slow down as he goes over the stoop, making him fearless, or very curious, I'm not sure which.

Padme is a beautiful dark-eyed sprite with gorgeous white fur which she keeps in pristine condition. She is quite the handful, and never wants to sit still, as there is always something that needs to be inspected. Her favorite thing in the world right now is a cheweasel, which she can devour in no time. Padme underwent adrenal surgery to remove her right adrenal gland in early May. They both appear to get along well with cats, and have a history of doing well with children. Anakin and Padme are still best of buddies, but they aren't exclusive and could be adopted separately if it is necessary. They are both very friendly and loving, and both or each will make a great addition to any ferret household. If you think you can make the commitment to giving Padme or Anakin the attention they deserve for the rest of their lives, contact the Cascade Ferret Network.



April's Story

April is in need of some "special needs" sponsors. April was named for the month in which she arrived at CFN. She was described as a ferret in a "pestilent condition". They assumed April's hair loss was caused by some kind of parasite (if you are familiar with ferrets, you can probably guess what April's problem really was: adrenal disease). April needed to be given a name since her owner never bothered giving her a name of her own. April's owner was also surprised to find that his ferret was a female rather than a male, as he had thought for all the years she lived with him. Her owner was very relieved to find out April actually had adrenal disease and needed surgery and was, in fact, not "pestilent". I think he was mostly glad to know his apartment wasn't infested with some sort of pest.

Apparently April did not get much handling as her owner had a disability that prevented him from being able to pick her up or pet her. She tried to nip me when I held her to determine her sex and condition. Her fur, what there was left of it, was like wire. She did at least have a cozy hammock in her cage and some jingle balls (her favorite toys), which accompanied her to her new life. Things didn't get much better for April when I took her to see Dr. Ramsell. She took an immediate dislike to these people scruffing her and poking her with needles and swabs to vaccinate her, get a blood sample to test for ADV and check her for ear mites. She tried her best to get a chomp in, but only succeeded in biting in half the wooden handle of a cotton-tipped swab. She was also very vocal about communicating her unhappiness with our actions. April finally made it to a foster home where she could start getting spoiled and letting her true nature shine through her rough appearance. Her foster parent has already been the recipient of some ferret kisses of gratitude. April will need adrenal surgery soon and because of her age, it may be hard to find her a new forever home. Sponsorships would help pay for April's adrenal surgery. If you sponsor April, in return you will receive photos and quarterly updates on how she is doing for a year. If you are interested in being a "special needs" sponsor of April, send the CFN a note and a check for \$60 or go to the CFN web page and follow the instructions to sponsor her online. Like all contributions to the CFN, your sponsorship is tax deductible!

Cascade Ferret Network
PO Box 14884
Portland, OR 97293-0884



Upcoming Events, Arrrr

*Cascade Ferret Network's 5th Annual
Ferret Awareness Day
"Yo Ho, Yo Ho, It's A Ferret's Life For Me!"
July 9th, 1pm-5pm
Oregon Humane Society
1067 NE Columbia Blvd.
Portland, OR*

Ahoy me mateys, and clear your poop-deck! CFN's 5th Annual Ferret Awareness Day looms on the horizon, and this year the saucy wenches planning the event is having some fun with a pirate theme, shiver me timbers! Anyone that lives with a ferret knows they would make mighty fine pirates: they love to pillage, pilfer and plunder, and are always pirating away their booty and stashing their treasures in secret hidey holes. Ye be warned! Dead socks tell no tales! They knows how to dance a jig, and for them ferretone be good as grog.

This here event is CFN's main fundraiser for the year, so bring your doubloons and pieces of eight to buy some treasures for yourself and your little furry pirates. To gain proper pirattitude for the event, see *Pirates of the Caribbean, Dead Man's Chest* (opens July 7th) or learn yourselves how to talk like a pirate: www.talklikeapirate.com/piratehome.html



ACTIVITIES:

- * Auction of unique ferret items
- * Shelter ferret playpen
- * Discount vet exams, melatonin implants
- * Pirate's Wheel of Booty
- * Ferret health talk
- * Raffle
- * New and used ferret supplies
- * Pirate-themed photo op for you and your ferrets

Avast there and attend the rules and regulations the Pirate Queens have decreed as good and proper:

Healthy ferrets in secure carriers outfitted with food, water and bedding are welcome to attend. Please make sure your ferrets have been fully vaccinated to protect them from distemper and are not contagious for any diseases. For your ferret's safety, we encourage everyone to keep their pets isolated from other ferrets, all activities and contests have been chosen and arranged so there is little chance of cross contamination.