

The Fuzzy Papers

NEWSLETTER OF THE MASSACHUSETTS FERRET FRIENDS

SUMMER 2001



Letter from The President

by Tracey Goodwin

I would like to begin by thanking the MaFF Board of Directors for 2000 — Jan Fleury, Bill Williamson and Sandy Ferreira. They have each given so much of themselves to this organization, we would not be where we are today without them. I would also like to thank my fellow board members: Phyllis Spy, Mark DeJesus and Cheryl Thompson. Because of their efforts, we have already made quite a bit of progress, with many exciting possibilities for the remainder of this year.

We are working on several new programs, and need the help of the membership to make them a success. Among them are efforts to have MaFF literature available at pet stores through out the state, a grant program and education tables at several

different pet events through out the state. In order to publicize MaFF and its mission, we need your help. If each member gave two hours of his or her time to MaFF, we could host an event every week for an entire year. This is not a lot of time to give, and the rewards are great. Even if you cannot commit to an event, there are several other areas where we could use your help. Many projects require work that can be done from the comforts of home, and I am sure our shelter Moms would greatly appreciate any offers to spend an afternoon helping at the shelter.

Enclosed in this issue of *The Fuzzy Papers* is a questionnaire. I ask that you take a few moments to fill it out and mail it back to us. We are interested in your thoughts and opin-

ions about the direction you would like to see MaFF take. Feel free to contact us at anytime with your ideas and concerns.

If you attended the Ferret Picnic in the Park [see *related article on Page 3 — Ed.*], then you have already seen the new, limited edition MaFF T-shirt. The artwork was the Design the New MaFF T-shirt Contest winner. Congratulations to the artist Sharon Orser. The T-shirt will be available at the many events MaFF will attend through out the year, and will be available for purchase on our website very soon.

I want to express my thanks to the many volunteers who have worked tirelessly to make the last few months very successful for MaFF. You have helped numerous ferrets through your efforts. It is the caring and commitment of people like you that make MaFF the wonderful organization that it is.

Lynn Legalization Update

by Sharon Burbine, MaFF Special Investigations

GREETINGS, All! I attended a recent Lynn City Council meeting just as an observer to see how the council works, how these hearings operate, etc. The issue on ferrets came up. It brought a few chuckles around the council. Surprisingly, at this meeting the full city council voted 10-1 to lift the ban, but take heed, ferret owners of Lynn: it's not over yet! I of course was in shock that the vote took place at all, as this wasn't listed in any public notices (I've

been faithfully reading through them each day since this all started). But now the ordinance is awaiting signature by the Mayor, so don't bring your ferret(s) to Lynn yet! Thing is, we do not yet know the actual text of this final version of the Ordinance, and so we do not know if we need to advise you about permit requirements and such. Once the "coast is clear," we plan to hold some kind of an event or rally to celebrate, so stay tuned. You can get the latest information by visit-

ing the MaFF web site at <http://maferrets.org>, and visiting the link from there to the speedbump site.

That evening, I hung around until the end of the meeting and spoke with the dissenting voter, a Mr. O'Brien. He had voted "no" in the closed hearing also. He immediately recognized me and we spoke briefly. I offered to speak to him about his concerns, etc. and he took me up on the offer to give him a phone call. I also

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(Lynn Legalization Update, Continued)

met up with Mr. Phalen outside in the parking lot and we spoke briefly. I am doing my best to remain in touch and to gather further news, which I will post as soon as it becomes available.

Meantime, the June 13th issue of the *Lynn Item* newspaper, Page A3, carried an article by Kathy Ehrich. The last paragraph of this article reads: "The Council also voted 10-1 in favor of a measure that would declassify the ferret as an exotic animal, thus allowing ferret lovers to legally keep their pets in the city without a special license." But again, keep your hats on

until we get that final signature!

The work will continue in Lynn. We'll start a local North Shore chapter soon as the situation stabilizes. Also, I'd like to have some kind of event at the Lynn City Commons: invite the press and the Lynn City Council (this is an election year and what better photo op would this be?). I'd like to do

something like we did in Framingham after statewide legalization. To mark that occasion we did the Easter Bonnet Parade. I'm thinking something on a patriotic theme for Lynn.

Thanks to all of you for your help and support in this. We're still not out of the woods yet... Although I slept much better last night!

Freckles Waits for YOU to Adopt Her

by Janice DeJesus, Gimmee Shelter Ferret Rescue

CONCERNED ferret owners like YOU can get involved and save ferret lives! This is just one of many stories showing how getting involved really does help.

One day in April a young lady and her significant other were in a local pet store when they noticed an older ferret in the cage with the youngsters all for sale. Eve noticed that the older girl was quite thin and seemed weak. When she questioned the pet store owner she did not feel satisfied that the ferret would receive help and continued to worry. So she decided to do something about it. She called a certain wonderful ferret vet and was given the very good and sound advice to report her concerns

to the Law Enforcement Division of the MSPCA, which she did — because when she took the little girl out of the cage she almost fell over from weakness!

As a result of Eve's prompt report, the little girl ferret was then confiscated and brought to the Brockton

MSPCA, whereupon a call was placed to Gimmee Shelter and advice was given to have the ferret see a vet at once. The ferret was found to have a blood sugar of 40! [*This is terribly low. A range of 80 to 120 is considered more normal — Ed.*]

The tiny older girl is now at Gimmee Shelter where she is eating and gaining strength. She has been named Freckles by her saving human, Eve, and is a very, very sweet little girl who surely deserved better and hopefully will find a loving family in the future!

Thank you, Kevin Spencer and Eve Valera — you both are wonderful people, for caring enough to get involved!



Little Freckles, rescued by Kevin Spencer and Eve Valera. She now waits at Gimmee Shelter Ferret Rescue for YOU to adopt her.

The Fuzzy Papers

*Is a publication of the
Massachusetts Ferret Friends, Inc.
(MaFF)*

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invited and encouraged.

Send articles or ideas for articles to the
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Picnic in the Park

by Phyllis Spy

THE weather was perfect, the air fresh and clean, and the trees had just sprouted their new spring finery. Amidst all this, in Ames Nowell State Park on May 26th, you could hear preparations being made for the 2001 MaFF Board of Directors Ferret Picnic in the Park. David Green, Park Supervisor and former ferret owner, was preparing to direct folks to the Pavilion where the picnic was to be held. It wasn't long before groups of people arrived toting pet carriers with fuzzies or pulling wagons loaded with cages of fuzzies. They consisted of MaFF members and non-members, all looking forward to spending a day in the park with their ferrets. Each person was warmly greeted by Cheryl Thompson and her assistant to be checked-in and given their fuzzy bandana, bottle of bubbles, and a membership questionnaire. Guests were invited to participate in the contests and games, and were given information on joining MaFF. After check-in, people found a comfortable spot to spread out their picnic blanket, get fuzzie outfitted with harness and leash and begin to meet new folks, greet old friends, and let fuzzies explore the soft pine needles — or make friends with new fuzzies.

The games consisted of the Cheerio / FerretBite Chomp, the Duck Soup Eating Contest and the Obstacle Course. The Cheerio Chomp had its usual fuzzie bewilderment as ferret owners tried desperately to keep fuzzies focused on Cheerios tied to a string. True to ferret-form, most competitors were more interested in everything **but** the Cheerio. But there were one or two ferrets whose passion for Cheerios took hold, and we ended up with contest winners. Cheryl Thompson's Teddy, who is blind and deaf, got some additional assistance and did quite well. Good effort, Teddy!

The Duck Soup Eating Contest, consisting of Duck Soup prepared by Tracey Goodwin, MaFF President, was suitable for all ferrets and there were lots of contestants. Most ferrets were slow in starting to consume Duck Soup in the allotted time, but were very content to finish their plate of soup at their leisure after the contest.

The most interesting game was the Obstacle Course, designed and built by Mark DeJesus, MaFF Vice President, which consisted of 10 obstacles including The Hallway Dash, The Bed Jump, and The Bathtub Leap. The ferrets tried to stay focused on the different obstacles, but Jan DeJesus's Luna completed the entire course, without missing an obstacle, in a record time of 40 seconds! Luna's handler and trainer was very pleased with her performance and hopes to see her in the World Championships in 2002.

While all this was going on, members and guests had an opportunity to visit the MaFF merchandise table and get help from Trudy Wallach in making their selections. Amy Robbin, our merchandise chairperson, did a great job of getting some new and interesting ferret goodies for this event. We also had Joanie DeJesus ready to collect money for the games and the Raffle Baskets. The Raffle Baskets were very impressive with the donated ferret goodies from Marshall Pet Products, Especially Pets, and Petco of North Attleboro. We even had a few baskets for the humans, like our Polar Pak outfitted with picnic supplies and our Ferret Library Basket filled with ferret-related books



Mommy, mommy! This thing you call "The Outdoors" is just One Big Flowerpot! **I like this!!!** [Photo by John Burt]

including the highly acclaimed new book: *Ferrets for Dummies*. Tracey Goodwin donated a Rice Play Box with lots of toys that was won by the only ferret who decided to use it as a litter box ... a very fitting winner.

And what would a picnic be without food! We had Stephen Nyan and Curt Thistle, our volunteer chefs, busy grilling and steaming hot dogs and serving them with chips, soft drinks and dessert snacks.

Phyllis Spy, MaFF Clerk and MC, kept everything running on schedule while making sure everyone had an opportunity to purchase merchandise and raffle tickets.

The 2001 MaFF Board of Directors would like to thank everyone who contributed to the success of our first fundraiser: our volunteers for their time, our shelter operators for their support, our members and guests for their participation, and most of all the fuzzies, for whom we have dedicated our time and energy to making their lives richer and full of love.

We invite everyone to visit our website, <http://maferrets.org>, to see some great pictures of our Ferret Picnic in the Park taken by John Burt. We look forward to seeing everyone next year for another great event!

The Fuzzy Papers

Deadlines for Submissions to
Upcoming Issues of
The Fuzzy Papers

For the Fall 2001 Issue
Thursday, August 16, 2001

For the Winter 2001 Issue
Friday, November 16, 2001

For the Spring 2002 Issue
Saturday, February 16, 2002

Snailmail your submissions to:
MaFF / *The Fuzzy Papers*
PO Box 3123
Wakefield, MA 01880
Or email to:
jfleury@maferrets.org

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Submissions to this publication in
the form of articles, letters, or
photographs, are
invited and encouraged.
Please feel free to send your
submissions to the
MaFF address above,
or via e-mail to Jan Fleury at
jfleury@maferrets.org

Articles or letters can be neatly
handwritten, or typed, or submitted
via e-mail or on 3.5" IBM formatted
diskette as plain ASCII Text
(no word processor-specific
formats, please).

Photos can be prints or
transparencies, must have
permission of those depicted,
and can be in either color
or black & white.

An Update on Fiscus Ferret

by Janice DeJesus
Gimmee Shelter Ferret Rescue

I have been wanting to send an update on Mr. Fiscus, but I had been waiting for the final diagnosis, as in my heart I knew we were not "hitting the nail on the head" so to speak. Well, unfortunately, we finally have it, and it is megaesophagus — which is terminal, and so he will live out the rest of his life here at Gimmee Shelter. [To learn more about megaesophagus in ferrets, visit the South Florida Ferret Help Line web site at www.miamiferret.org/fhc/megaesophagus.htm. Briefly: "Megaesophagus is the dilation of the esophagus due to the lack of muscular motility. When the ferret attempts to swallow, the food or liquid cannot be propelled into the stomach causing the esophagus to swell as it fills. As a result, breathing may be impaired, and the ferret regurgitates." — Ed.]

We have been syringe feeding Fiscus for three months and will continue to do so, but his time is very lim-

ited. He has good days and bad. I cannot describe how I love this little guy and wish with all my heart that I could give him many years of feeling loved and secure. He is asleep in my lap as I write this. Today has not been the greatest for him. It was a struggle to keep anything down. Yesterday was better, and I can only hope for a good tomorrow. He does not have a lot of energy so I do not worry about him running away. I don't want people to think that he is in awful shape yet or anything, he just has good days and bad. [Phyllis Spy stops by Gimmee Shelter and spends lots of time with Fiscus, as does everyone at the shelter. — Ed.] He sleeps with two of my own now as Luna and Umma have accepted him and seem to want to protect him. He is so purely good, I don't understand how anyone with a soul could have been so cruel as to abandon him.



Fiscus loves to wander around outside in the warm grass on sunny days. He will now live out his life as a permanent resident at Gimmee Shelter Ferret Rescue.

"Nurse" Luna (right), along with Umma, another resident at Gimmee Shelter, has taken a special interest in Fiscus. Here Luna is giving Fiscus a gentle washing.

See also a lovely website devoted to Fiscus at www.geocities.com/ferretlover96/ferrets.html



Ferrets Across the Sea

*Second Article in a Series
from Jonathan Platt,
Lowton St. Marys, England*

In case you missed the first letter from Jonathan in our Spring issue, we have been receiving some fascinating emails from a gentleman living in the United Kingdom who has kindly agreed to continue with yet another installment of his perspective on ferrets. MaFF is grateful to Mr. Platt for his permission to publish this, his second letter to those of us here in "The Colonies" who share his enthusiasm for ferrets. —Ed.

SOME of the things I write may shock you a little, but I can't tell you about the life of a working ferret without sometimes having to refer to things that may be distasteful to you. Attitudes have thankfully changed over the last twenty years, and many people in the UK now keep ferrets as pets.

I bought my first ferret from a boy at school, his name was George Anderton. He's presently doing ten years in prison for selling heroin. Most people who live here in the north west of England would just say "typical of a man who owns ferrets and lurchers." In most people's minds ferrets were associated with poachers, gypsies and "lurcher men" and many of these people live beyond the law. Many of the ferret owners I know have been in trouble with the law in the past (I haven't by the way — you're not communicating with an ex-con!). Why this association of criminals, lurchers and ferrets ever came about is difficult to say, but it is certainly true, at least in the North of England. When I was young I lived beside a disused railway line which was used as a "gateway" into the countryside from the local town. Every weekend gangs of tattooed youths would march past the house from first light onwards, a dozen motley dogs around their heels and ferret boxes strapped on their backs. Thankfully, 95% of these thugs quickly gave

up ferreting and moved on to stealing cars and sniffing glue. I have a friend who came into ferreting this way, but he wasn't part of the 95% who gave up. An ex-Hells Angel, he now keeps half a dozen ferrets in excellent conditions and hunts them regularly throughout the season. The problem with ferrets in this country is they don't cost enough! Nobody in their right mind would pay more than £5 for one (around 8 dollars I think). If you wait till late summer you can usually get a youngster for nothing as the breeders are keen to get them off their hands before they eat them out of house and home. Most breeders are "backyard breeders," people who breed stock for themselves and sell or give away any ferrets remaining. The trouble with all this is that because ferrets are so cheap some people don't care about their welfare - "if it dies I'll buy another one" sort of attitude. If ferrets cost £100 each I don't think this attitude would prevail.

Anyway, lets go on to something more pleasant. I've had a look at the photos of ferrets on your web site and they look pretty much like ours. All our ferrets are descended from the wild European Polecat, we call an albino polecat a ferret and a polecat-coloured animal, well, a polecat! Polecats and ferrets will breed freely together as they're basically the same animal. As in your pics we get a wide variety of colours if polecats and ferrets are crossed. I once bred a litter of beautiful sable coloured ferrets. Truly wild polecats are quite rare in the UK, their stronghold being the mountains of Wales. But there are colonies of polecats that have bred up from escaped ferrets and polecats in other parts of the country.

I'll tell you something about how we work our ferrets. Ferrets are used basically to bolt animals from holes. I mainly hunted rabbits, but occasionally rats if one of the farms I hunted over had a problem with them. I have heard of people deliberately using them to bolt foxes, but I would

never do that as the ferret could very easily get killed. Having said that I did once bolt a fox from a rabbit warren in the Cotswolds (a beautiful area in the midlands of England). I had no idea the fox was in and normally if a fox was in a warren the ferrets would refuse to enter, their fur would puff up like a bottle brush! For some reason on this day the ferrets went in the warren and a few minutes later out flew a small vixen fox! Other animals I've seen bolt from a warren are birds, weasels, stoats, cats, hedgehogs (like a miniature porcupine), and squirrels. So, as you can see, the life of a working ferret can be a bit treacherous at times, but they are doing nothing a wild polecat wouldn't do. Our European stoats are very similar to a ferret, the males being about the same size as a female ferret, but for some reason, they always bolt. I'm sure if they wanted to make a fight of it the ferret would back down, as stoats are lightning fast, but this never happens — stoats always bolt.

You can't really train a ferret to work for you, it's a bit like a falconer who flies a hawk, the hawk comes back for food, not for the love of its master, although most ferrets will come to a call if there is nothing doing down below. Having said that I have had ferrets that genuinely appeared to have affection for me — Hob Nob (the ferret I mentioned in my first email) was wonderful and would follow me around like a dog and would come looking for me if he came out of a hole unseen, whereas other ferrets would just wander off. I could usually call Hob Nob out of a warren, unless he was keen on the trail of a rabbit. I remember on one occasion when he had me in stitches with his antics. I'd put him down a hole, but nothing had bolted. I waited twenty minutes then went over to the hole and yelled "Hob Nob, get your ***** ass out of there." Seconds later he appeared with a look on his face that said "for crying out loud, just let me get on with my job," then he turned and went

back down the hole. Five minutes later a rabbit hit the purse net!

What's a purse net I hear you say? Purse nets are nets shaped like a bag, with a string running around the top which is attached to a wooden peg. The wooden peg is pushed into the ground and the net laid over the hole. When a rabbit hits the net, the string around the top of the net tightens up, trapping the rabbit within. This was my preferred method of catching rabbits as it gave you the option of releasing the rabbit if you wanted to. This may sound odd, why catch a rabbit then release it. Well, you may want to only kill the males (males kill many baby rabbits when there are too many of them) or you may want to move the rabbits from one area to another that has no rabbits.

As I said earlier, you can't really train a ferret, so inevitably they do get lost. I've had very few ferrets die, most eventually got lost. Before you throw your hands up in anguish, a ferret that has been worked regularly is quite capable of surviving in the wild. Also, if a ferret is lost, there's a good chance that it will be picked up sometime by another ferreter. Every year we'd find a ferret or two whilst out ferreting, and they'd be none the worse for their stint of freedom. You have to decide when you first take up keeping ferrets whether you will allow your animals to "go to ground" or not. If you don't want to, then fine, just keep them as pets. But if you decide you want to take up ferreting then you have to understand that eventually you are going to lose one of your trusted hunting partners. When I first started ferreting there was no such thing as telemetry (a small transmitter that fits onto the collar of a ferret; you can then track the progress of the ferret underground using a receiver), if your ferret "laid up" (killed a rabbit, ate its fill and fell asleep) you had two choices: wait or dig! I usually waited as I'm lazy! I feel it's the best thing to do anyway as, unless you could hear the ferret underground, you had no

idea where it was and just had to start at the first hole and follow the tunnel back. Fine if you're on a simple three hole warren, but a might tricky if you're on a two hundred hole sandhill! With the advent of telemetry things became much easier. If a ferret lies up, you just cast the receiver over the warren until you get a signal — it will even tell you roughly how deep down the ferret is. I was once ferreting a big warren in the Cotswolds with some friends. We put in two ferrets, both with transmitters on their collars. We were actually using terrier telemetry systems, that could be picked up 18ft down, as opposed to the ferret telemetry that only went 8ft. For some reason I turned my receiver on and could hear the steady bleeping as the ferret went deeper and deeper. On and on it went then, to my alarm, it started to fade. "Switch your bleeper on" I called to Nick, who owned the other ferret. He too got the same result. Eventually the signal disappeared completely, we sat and waited, agreeing that we'd pick the ferrets up as soon as they showed. Eventually my ferret appeared at the bottom of a bank twenty yards away, followed shortly by my friend's (this happens regularly, one ferret must follow the other's scent). We've visited that farm many times since then, but we never ferret that warren, God knows how deep it is. On another occasion I was ferreting a warren on sandhills on the Mull of Kintyre (yes, The Mull of Kintyre of the Paul McCartney and Wings song - and yes, it is beautiful, I lived there for two years). I was with a friend and his girlfriend, who weren't really ferreters at all, but had wanted to see what it was all about. Some of the warrens were enormous, so I went to the edge of the sandhills where it ran out to farmland and here the warrens seemed smaller. I had "Little Jill" (one of the few of my ferrets that ever had names — sorry!) with me and two of her offsprings, both jills, all albino ferrets. I put a youngster down a warren that looked no more than six holes. I got a

little concerned when a stoat suddenly bolted from a hole around fifty yards away! Sometimes a young, inexperienced ferret is like any young animal, even humans, it finds a nice warm place and falls asleep! So I put in mum to wake it up. After twenty minutes or so I realised the warren was definitely a lot bigger than I thought, as rabbits started to bolt 40 or 50yds away. In desperation I entered the last remaining jill hoping she might just shake things up a little. Nothing. Three ferrets down and nothing moving. My friends wandered off. An hour later they reappeared, saying they wanted to go home. As I'd come in their car there was little I could do, it was late afternoon and would be dark within the hour. I couldn't possibly block all the holes as I'd no idea how far the warren went. I left their box full of straw next to the hole I'd originally entered them into and headed for home. At first light the next day I was on the sandhills. I walked over to the warren containing my three ferrets with a heavy heart, I had little hope of seeing them again. Their box was empty, it's always a bit of a forlorn hope. With little hope of success I stamped my feet on the top of the warren (I always do this, it's a sort of wake up call). To my amazement a ferret's head appeared at a hole. Then another. Then another! They were very nervous and it took me a lot of coaxing (plus a dead rabbit I'd brought with me!) to get them out of the holes, but eventually I had all three safely boxed up. Never, before or since, have I lost three ferrets in one day!

One golden rule when ferreting is to never enter a ferret into a single hole warren (unless you know for sure that it's only a short hole), but we all do it occasionally — then regret it! The problem is that the rabbit has no escape and you will probably end up digging to the ferret that has killed the rabbit at the end of the hole. One day I was ferreting a railway embankment, it was around 9am on a November morning. I saw a rabbit cross the rail-

way lines and disappear into the banking. When I got there all I could see was a single hole, I know I shouldn't have done it but I netted up and entered a young jill. At half past ten it began to rain. By dinnertime the rain had turned to sleet. At 4.30pm, in the half light, with both me and the dogs drenched and freezing cold, the ferret emerged, with a very smug look on its face and a full belly. Never ferret a single hole warren!

A bit about the relationship of the ferrets with the dogs: As far as my experience goes, ferrets don't like dogs. My dogs ignore ferrets, they're trained from an early age to leave them alone. If I was ferreting a warren and I couldn't see some of the holes I'd put my dog near the holes that I couldn't see. This way I could tell when a ferret came out of one of these holes as the dog would get up and walk off. Inevitable the ferret would attack the dog if it saw it (and ferrets don't have the best eyesight in the world!), but my dogs wouldn't retaliate, they would simply walk away. I've had two ferrets bitten by dogs (and many dogs bitten by ferrets!), the first was a hob ferret that I took to a friend's who had a problem with a rat that had taken up residence in their garage. At the time I had a German Shorthaired Pointer, which I took with me. Jaeger was used to ferrets, so what happened next was surprising. The ferret appeared from under a chest of drawers behind the dog, and promptly bit poor Jaeger on his foot. Before he thought about it, I think, he spun round and bit the ferret. The ferret disappeared back under the chest of drawers and it took me an age to get him out. When I finally did I found the ferret had a limp when it walked. I took him to the local vet who regarded him from a distance (this is 15 years ago by the way) and told me he'd injured his leg! Never! I took him home and kept him in the kitchen in his box to keep him warm (I think shock kills more animals than almost anything, I've always found the best thing to do

is keep them warm and quiet, I've seen animals die from the shock of having an injection that it never really needed in the first place. Vets very often do things to make the owner of the animal feel better — not the animal). He limped for a few weeks but eventually he was fine, I think it was severe bruising rather than anything more serious. The second incident occurred whilst ferreting in Argyll, Scotland. My uncle and I had hiked up a huge mountain on the request of the farmer to ferret rabbits. I put a small jill into a little warren under a huge rock. On these mountains it is so quiet you can hear the sound of the rabbits running around, stamping their alarm calls with their back feet. Eventually a rabbit bolted and threw the purse net (escaped in other words!) I had a wonderful dog with me at the time, a beautiful lurcher called Jake. He was totally "broken" to ferrets and would always walk away from a potential confrontation. But this time the ferret was riding on the back of the rabbit as it bolted! Jake flashed after the rabbit and snatched the ferret off its back! Immediately he realised his mistake and dropped the little jill, who shot back under the boulder. "That's it" I thought "I'll be here all day waiting for her to come out." But I couldn't have been more mistaken — within minutes she'd bolted another rabbit and followed it out. I quickly picked her up and placed her back in her box, but she seemed none the worse for her ordeal, and she bolted several more rabbits that day.

As can be seen, the life of a working ferret can sometimes be dangerous. If you stick to rabbits there is not much danger, apart from being kicked by the rabbit. Rabbits have incredibly powerful back legs and sharp claws (I know, I've had my arms raked by them many times whilst trying to extract a lively rabbit from a purse net!). Hob Nob got kicked by a rabbit when very young and always bore a scar between his eyes. But most rabbits will bolt ahead of the ferret, so

confrontations don't occur. With rats it's different. A big buck rat or, worse still, a female rat with young, can be a considerable opponent. Some ferrets won't face a rat and simply refuse to go to ground after them. Fair enough — I wouldn't do it, and I just kept these ferrets for rabbits. But some ferrets absolutely love the battle and prefer to hunt rat more than anything. The size of the ferret doesn't mean a thing. A big hob cannot normally get down a rat hole, Hob Nob was quite big and found it difficult to get to most rats. But I have had tiny jills that became excellent ratters. I particularly remember a tiny polecat jill that was excellent except that when she came up you had to let her have a wander about for a minute to calm down, otherwise she was liable to bite you. Normally she was as soft as a kitten and would never dream of biting, but for that first minute after emerging from a rat hole, she lost her head a little! I would be lying if I told you that my ferrets never got injured when ratching, but I can honestly say that all the injuries were very minor, and I never had a ferret that suffered lasting injuries. I know some of this must seem terrible to you but ferrets have always been used in this country to hunt rats, many pest control officers to this day still use ferrets. Sometimes its impossible to use poison or traps to deal with rats, but ferrets can be safely used. Much of my ratching was done in big hen sheds where it was too dangerous to use poison or traps. Rats are often encountered in rabbit warrens anyway. I once ferreted a warren on the side of a road, I was using a inexperienced white jill. I stood on a fence that ran along the top of the road banking. Suddenly I saw the purse net move and a white tail appear — the ferret was coming out backwards. Slowly she backed out until she'd emerged completely, then I saw why. There was a big rat fighting her out! To be honest the ferret didn't want to know, and would much rather have been somewhere else at that moment, so I

jumped off the fence and picked her up. Although she became a good rabbit biter, she wouldn't go near a rat!

As I said before, some ferrets can become a little wild when they have been battling with rats, but apart from that none of my ferrets has ever bitten me. I've almost always bought young ferrets or reared my own, if I handled them from an early age biting was never a problem. Except, sadly, for one exception. I reared a litter of polecats whilst I lived in Scotland: only a small litter, four if I remember correctly. The mother was a nice, quiet jill that I'd had for several years. The father was a sandy coloured hob. He was also a quiet, steady small hob. I kept one of the jill kits and a hob, and my friend who had supplied the sire had the other two jill kits. Everything was fine at first, but as the hob grew older he became more and more aggressive, not just with me but with his mum and sister. Eventually I had to build another hutch for him. When I lifted the lid on the hutch he would dash out and actually try to attack me, the only way I could handle him was with thick leather gloves. I tried to take him hunting (many young ferrets calm down when taken hunting) but, although he worked okay, he would immediately try to bite me if I tried to pick him up. I persevered with him for months, but he got no better. He was hyperactive and would spend hours pacing his hutch, even after a long days hunting when most ferrets have their food and disappear into their sleeping compartments until the next day. It got to the state where I wasn't taking him hunting with me, as he just caused me problems. One day I got up, boxed him up and took him to the vets to be destroyed. I know this may shock you, but I'd honestly done everything I could to tame him. I could have released him into the wild, but I really think having him put to sleep was the best thing. He wasn't happy, sometimes I think he lived in a constant fear of something, so strange was his behaviour. I believe he had

some mental disorder. I could have kept him locked up in his hutch for the rest of his life I suppose, but what sort of life would that have been? I asked the vet what she thought about him, but she admitted she didn't have a clue. It was sad, but I still think I made the right decision. I've kept ferrets for almost thirty years and this was the only one I've ever had put to sleep.

Let's talk about something less sad. As I said before I fed my ferrets almost exclusively on flesh, very often rabbit heads, heart, lungs, and liver (actually, is this less sad? — sorry!). When I lived in Scotland I caught a lot of fish (usually mackerel) and I often fed them these. My ferrets always seemed to love fish. I didn't usually have problems getting food for them except in the summertime if I had a big litter. I remember one year when "Little Jill" had eight youngsters. I already had Hob Nob and another jill, so I had eleven ferrets in all. Normally I would have sold the ones I didn't want by five or six weeks (I only wanted one for myself!) but a friend in Scotland wanted two, so I said I'd tame them for him and take them up for him in September. Then a guy turned up and said he'd take the remaining five. He asked me if I could keep them for him for a week as he was going on holiday, which I agreed to do. I didn't see him for two months! He did eventually turn up, but not before the bloody ferrets had nearly eaten me out of house and home! I went around the farms I hunted over and asked them to ring me if any of their chickens got "egg bound" (a common thing amongst laying poultry) and died. I seemed to spend most of that summer looking for ferret food. The young kits had quickly outgrown their hutch, so I moved them into a shed. One evening when I was supposed to be going to the cinema with my girlfriend. I thought I'd feed the kits before we went, so Dawn came out to help me. I opened the shed door and what I can only describe as a tide of ferrets flowed forth! As soon as I put one

back, another got out. It took Dawn and I an age to get them back in — the next day I moved the dogs out of their pen and into the house (they loved that!) and the kits into the dog pen! I've never fed ferrets commercial ferret food, I've nothing against it and I understand it's very good — it would certainly be less messy — but I've always had a supply of fresh food and my ferrets have thrived on this diet. They've eaten everything from rats to a still born calf with no problems whatsoever. When I was young some of the older ferreters fed their ferrets entirely on bread and milk! Then they wondered why their ferrets killed rabbits and layed up on them when put into a warren!

Talking about some of the older ferreters, some of the things they did were barbaric. I think it may upset you too much if I told you everything that went on, but believe me, it was terrible. When I first started ferreting you could buy a contraption called a "ferret muzzle." The idea behind this thing was that the ferrets couldn't kill the rabbits down a warren. But what happened if the ferret got lost with the muzzle on? There was no way it could get it off and was doomed to die an awful death from starvation. As I say, things have changed completely now, but I feel ashamed of what some of the old ferreters did to their ferrets.

I think that's enough for now! You probably fell asleep after the first few paragraphs, sorry, but if it's something I enjoy writing about I can write forever. I've not kept ferrets myself for a few years as I've suffered from ill-health since I came back from Scotland four years ago, and sometimes it's been a struggle to look after myself and my two dogs, let alone a hutch full of ferrets. But, hopefully, there is light at the end of the tunnel, as I've begun to feel much better since Christmas. So maybe come the autumn, I'll feel fit enough to take a ferret on again (in fact I know I will!) Thanks for listening.

Fresh Water Ferret Fetish

by Dianne Wood

DESPITE his abysmal showing in the "First Into the Swimming Pool" competition at the Spring Frolic, our T.J. has an obsession with water. For example, he LOVES divebombing into the bathtub (unassisted, and to the dismay of anyone who might be occupying it at the time!) T.J. (which stands for "Tigger/Jeckyl" — a combination of his pre-adoption name and the moniker we added after discovering the more "fiendish" side of his bouncy personality) doesn't care if it's his bath time or not, or even if no one is around to watch. He's singlemindedly intent upon licking up the residual drops remaining after one of us has taken a shower.

Stretching his full eight inch frame up the outside of the tub, he will peer in to see if the surface is sufficiently wet. If satisfied that his efforts will be worthwhile, he crouches down in preparation for a mighty leap, which as often as not lands him dead center in the moisture covered tub bottom. Without missing a beat, T.J. methodically proceeds to slurp up the water with all the efficiency of a miniature shop-vac. On occasion, his ferrety curiosity leads him to the drain hole, into which he stuffs his snout, emitting an echoing "snuffle-snort" until he tires of his tub tour.

Of course, his "wet 'n' wild" adventure doesn't stop there. After leaping back out of the tub (frequently landing in an unceremonious heap on the bath mat), he continues in his quest to "drink in" the surroundings — and all available water in the process. He charges across the bathroom floor toward the "facility" (fortunately the lid is always down unless the commode is in use). For T.J., though, the toilet offers a conveniently positioned stepping stone to the sink.

A familiar "clang-tinkle-whirl" reverberates down the hall, announcing

the commencement of T.J.'s ritualized routine, which usually occurs within five minutes after release from his cage, at least twice daily. He climbs onto the vanity, thrusts his head into the plastic drinking cup, and promptly knocks it into the basin with a clatter (a sound effect "extra" which, in his deafness, he cannot appreciate). Diving in after the cup, he licks around the drain and investigates the faucet opening for any stray drips, all the while practicing his balancing act while sliding down the smooth slant

of the sink's slippery bowl.

Although we have managed to designate "out-of-reach" storage places for such items as slippers, keys, and pantry goodies, the bathroom fixtures remain perpetually accessible to T.J. But if indulging his innocent "fetish" keeps him happy (and well hydrated), who are we to interfere? *[This story had me laughing right out loud, remembering my little Rikki Tikki Tavi who was also a born "tub-jumper." Rikki used to like to jump into the shower, and then he loved to be held so that the warm water drummed on his back. Then we would towel him off and turn him loose for some real ferrety hopping fun! — Ed.]*

Ferret Time!

a poem by Dianne Wood

Morning time is ferret time!
The sleepy rascals wake,
And instantly run off to see
what mischief they can make.

Who knows what treasures now may lie
Awaiting on the floor?
A bag, a box, a pair of socks —
(Not there the night before...)

For every object to explore
Becomes a brand-new toy,
To climb into or tunnel through,
Or dance around, in joy!

Mommy's making breakfast now,
What better time to beg?
Some tasty treat they like to eat
Or nibble Mommy's leg.

When Daddy shaves, they have to "help."
Climb up the bathroom sink.
A fuzzy clown pulls towels down,
Then tries to get a drink.

The merry madness slows its pace
As quickly as begun —
A hidey-hole their only goal,
To rest — 'til nighttime fun!

Massachusetts Ferret Friends — Summer 2001



Fuzzy Events You Won't Want to Miss!

MaFF Board Meeting - Tuesday, July 10, 7 to 9 PM

Location To Be Decided

Everyone is invited to attend and participate in decision-making for our statewide organization. Please call the MaFF Hotline for further details (978)957-9886.

PetRock 2001 - Sunday, August 12, Noon to 4 PM

Hebert's Candy Mansion, Route 20, Shrewsbury, MA

A fun filled day featuring more than 40 different rescue groups, shelters, humane societies, and VCA clinics as well as a professional photographer, cartoonist, pet food vendors, retailers, entertainment, children's activities, and more!! Last year's attendance was over 10,000 humans and animals. Join MaFF for this very important event. To volunteer, contact Tracey Goodwin at president@maferrets.org.

MaFF Board Meeting - Tuesday, August 14, 7 to 9 PM

Location To Be Decided

Everyone is invited to attend and participate in decision-making for our statewide organization. Please call the MaFF Hotline for further details (978)957-9886.

Ferretstock II - Saturday, September 8

Marlborough Recreational Pavilion, Marlborough, NH

An all-day extravaganza, rain or shine! Events include Blessing of the Animals, Rescue Processional. Fun Events include: MUSIC, lip balm & soap making seminars & demonstrations, MUSIC, craft exhibitions, ask the vet, a ferret photo contest, frolic games & contests including: ferrets walk-a-thon, best ferret tattoo modeled by human, photos, themed costume contests, Blackest nose, whitest mitts, largest/smallest ferrets etc. silent auction, cheesecake & pastry auction! Ferret vendors, clubs, food and refreshments, and much, much more! Advance admission is \$4 per adult; \$2 per youth (accompanied by adult); \$5 and \$3 at the gate. For more information, to make donations, or for directions contact Ferret Wise at 603 876 4975.

MaFF Board Meeting - Tuesday, September 11, 7 to 9 PM

Everyone is invited to attend and participate in decision-making for our statewide organization. Please call the MaFF Hotline for further details (978)957-9886.

Ferret Festival/7th Annual Ferret Awareness Day - Saturday, September 15, 10 AM to 3 PM

National Guard Armory, Nashua, NH

Sponsored the New Hampshire Ferret Owners Connection, you won't want to miss this once-a-year ferret extravaganza! Beautiful trophies and prizes for top participants. Enter your ferret in our fun and easy contests. Prizes and ribbons for 2nd and 3rd and runners-up, too! Bring your best ferret pix for the photo competition. Kids, get ready for the coloring contest. Also: vaccinations by a vet, professional photographer, vendors galore, yummy food, raffles, yard sale table and more! For more information, call NHFOC at 603 669 5062, or 603 424 2941, or send email to ALLFerret@aol.com.

Boston Pet Expo - Saturday & Sunday, September 29 & 30, 9 to 5 PM

Bayside Expo Center, Boston, MA

MaFF's major education event of the year, the Pet Expo is an exciting and fun filled weekend. Vendors galore line the aisles, and interesting demonstrations occur throughout each day. Help MaFF by volunteering for a 2 hour time slot! Contact Tracey Goodwin at president@maferrets.org.

For more information and latest news on Fuzzy Events, see the MaFF web site at <http://maferrets.org>

MaFF Website Reconstruction

MaFF's website has changed a bit in recent weeks. This is because after years of hosting and support by our past president, Brian McGovern, a situation developed where he was no longer able to host us. We would like to thank Brian and Tina McGovern for maintaining and looking after our website for so very long.

MaFF vice president Mark DeJesus has been working with the Board and with other MaFF web masters past and present (including Karl Zimmerman and Bryan Coffey — our sincere thanks to these unsung heroes as well, for all their help with MaFF's website!) to relocate and rebuild the site. If you have difficulty getting to us using the URL <http://www.maferrets.org>, that's probably because we are currently accessible at <http://maferrets.org> instead. Stop by and visit if you haven't done so in a while!

Books Available from MaFF

The following books can be purchased from MaFF. Proceeds go to benefit MaFF's mission of shelter, education, and outreach.

Essentials of Ferrets – A Guide for Practitioners

by Karen Purcell, DVM — \$49

The Ferret — An Owner's Guide to a Happy Healthy Pet

by Mary Shefferman — \$12

Ferrets for Dummies

by Kim Schilling — \$19.50

Practical Guide to Ferret Care

by Debra Jeans — \$18

The Pet Ferret Owner's Manual

by Judith Bell, DVM, Ph.D. — \$12

Add \$4 to the above prices for shipping and handling, and send your order to: MaFF, PO Box 3123, Wakefield, MA 01880. Or, for more information, send e-mail to info@maferrets.org.

The Adventures of MacLeod MacFerret Episode 9: MacLeod – First Ferretnaut

by Barbaralee Baron and Cyndi Farr

LIVING in Florida has some wonderful advantages. Other than the fact that you can go swimming all year round, there's the Kennedy Space Center. Mom took me there a few months ago to see the shuttle being launched and we met an astronaut named Dale Peterson. Dale was so intrigued with me that he wanted to take me up on his next mission. As we entered MERRITT ISLAND, a nature preserve that shares its land with the Space Center, I saw an occupied bald eagle's nest, pelicans swimming in the water off shore, and also a gator sunning himself on the banks.

The entrance to Kennedy Space Center has these big rocket boosters that help the shuttle get into orbit, and a real shuttle that visitors can walk through. It's very impressive to look at these huge (at least to someone my size) objects. From here we boarded a bus that took us over to the launch site. Here we were taken to the ready room. That's where the astronauts get dressed. I was fitted for a special suit, one that allowed room for my tail — humans don't have tails — and a special helmet. Dale Peterson, commander and veteran astronaut, gave me the thumbs up sign, indicating that we were ready to board. It was T minus 30 minutes and counting. A transport called a crawler took us over to the launch pad, where we took an elevator up to the shuttle cabin door. Once inside we took our seats — except in my case a hammock. It had straps in it so I wouldn't float all around once we reached outside the earth's atmosphere. It was T minus 10 minutes.

We did our preflight check and then it was time for lift off. The shuttle shook as the rocket's boosters fired up and slowly lifted us towards the

sky. It was frightening and exciting all at the same time and very deafening.

As we soared through the earth's atmosphere and entered space, all the stars came out to greet us and the earth looked like a big blue marble. We docked with the space station and Commander Peterson unstrapped me from my hammock. As I floated up I got so excited I tried to do a weasel waltz, but let me tell you it's not easy in zero gravity. With his help I made it through into the space station. This place was cool. Each astronaut had his/her own set of cabinets, refrigerator and freezer. This way everyone had his or her own favorite foods. In the bathroom there was a special litter box with a hole in the corner that sucks everything out. What a job it was trying to back up into that. I had to grab the edges and hold my butt down. Dinnertime was even more interesting. Food in a tube and every time I took a drink of water I had to go chasing it. It was fun chasing my jingle balls all over the cabin. They kept hiding in the ceiling.

The Space Station also had a garden and a lab where they were running a test to see how plants grew in space and to see how bacteria would grow. I wish we could have landed on the moon. It would have been fun to ride in the moon rover and bounce over the craters. Maybe on the next mission. Then it was time to prepare for departure and our trip back to earth, where I could put my paws back on solid earth and weasel waltz.

Space is not the final frontier for a ferret. Till my next adventure.

**Stay Tuned for
Episode 10!**



Massachusetts Ferret Friends — Summer 2001

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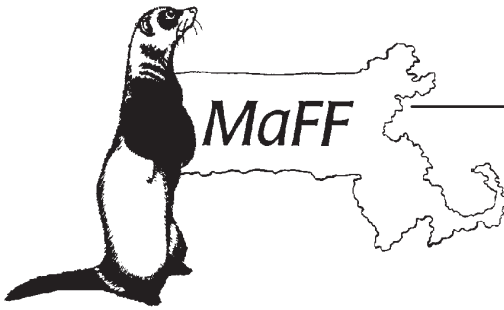
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