

The Fuzzy Papers

NEWSLETTER OF THE MASSACHUSETTS FERRET FRIENDS
WINTER 1999



Fostering Ferrets

by Catherine Bell, MaFF Shelter Committee Chairperson

THE Massachusetts Ferret Friends began as an organization to promote and shepherd through the State legislature laws which would legalize ferrets as pets in Massachusetts and establish a quarantine period for ferrets accused of biting humans. Those goals having been achieved some three years ago, it is time to refocus the organization toward two of its other charter tasks: educating the public about ferrets, and providing support for no-kill ferret shelters across the state. As chairman of the Shelter Committee, it is my purpose to address this last issue.

As you probably know, the domestic ferret inundated the pet market shortly after legalization in 1996, achieving fad status. People bought ferrets from pet stores knowing little or nothing about them, and were poorly prepared for the future with their new animals. Information about ferret behavior and disease was not generally understood by the pet stores, the public, or many vets, and the new owners had to fend for themselves until and unless they found books, magazines, Web info or groups such as MaFF. Many people have done that, but an alarming number of people who own ferrets now three years old and older, sick and in need of surgery and/or medical care, cannot or will not deal with the situation and insist on getting rid of their animals.

The lucky ones are those who are surrendered by their former own-

ers to a no-kill shelter, such as those sponsored by MaFF. There are many more who are dumped in the wild or suffer worse fates. Some of those are found and brought to MaFF shelters, or other animal shelters such as those run by the MSPCA or the Animal Rescue League. Many of these shelters do not maintain strict no-kill policies, so MaFF shelter operators have worked closely with as many of these shelters as possible in the hopes of saving the lives of as many ferrets as we can, which often means removing the ferrets from the other shelter system(s). As a result, MaFF shelters are becoming overloaded with strays, cast-offs and transfers from other shelter systems. It is putting a huge strain on our shelter system and our foster parents. To make matters worse, there have been several cases lately of neglect or cruelty caused by collectors who have surrendered or abandoned their ferrets. These cases cause sudden, drastic increases in the number of ferrets needing accommodation within an already stressed system. It is clear that we need more space for these animals, and the only way to do this is to find more people willing to foster ferrets on short-, mid- and long-term bases.

The good news is, fostering does not have to be a sad proposition. Not all ferrets in need of short- to mid-term foster care are old, sick or badly-behaved. Some are young, 1-3 years old, bouncing with health and sweet

as can be. We simply need overflow housing for them. Ferrets three years old and up are not all doomed right away to some dread disease, nor are they all practically catatonic, as some would have you believe. I have many ferrets over three years old who range in behavior from mellow, sweet lap-weasels to kooky psycho-beasties who never run out of energy until they have once again conquered every ferret in my business and pooped in every allowable corner of their area.

Even many of the sick ones, such as those with insulinoma, are easy to manage and have good long-term (up to three years or so on prednisone) survival. All you need do with many of them is give them "duck soup," sometimes with prednisone, two or three times a day and make sure they get good exercise and regular check-ups. Post-operative adrenal ferrets often have an excellent prognosis and can live out a normal life, hair and all, after successful surgery. Furthermore, the medical costs associated with a foster ferret are covered by the shelter concerned. You just provide the time, care and affection.

Please consider fostering one or two more ferrets in your home, for whatever amount of time you can manage. You would be providing a chance for life and happiness not only to the animal(s) you foster, but to those who can then come into the shelter system, thanks to the room you have made available in it.

For further information on fostering, please contact your nearest MaFF shelter or Catherine Bell, MaFF Shelter Committee Chairperson. □

Letter from the President

by Karen Purcell, DVM

WELL folks, this is my last letter as President of MaFF for this year. Nominations for the position are being accepted for elections this winter. While I did regret taking on this job at times, overall it has been a very positive experience, both in terms of personal growth and the changes that have occurred in MaFF.

As much as you are sick of hearing it, the main problem with MaFF is

still participation. We had a wonderful frolic at Halloween, with a raffle, auction, games, the costume contest, more vendors than ever before, a tremendous turnout of people — truly, a good time was had by all. This event was run by less than a dozen people, many exhausted by their efforts in addition to their personal lives. The reason we do this: the ferrets. We raised a lot of money to get much needed supplies and medical care for our shelter ferrets. Better than that, we touched the heart of a previous ferret owner, and a large donation was made directly to the shelter fund during the course of the event. I will keep the donor anonymous, but send my heartfelt thanks to him from the fuzzies, and from myself, for giving me a reminder of why we do these events — to educate, provide outreach and aid in placing ferrets in loving homes.

On a sadder note, many people

have left MaFF in the last year whose presence is sorely missed. Our membership has dropped to 71. If you know a ferret owner who would like to be a member, bring them along to a board meeting some month. We are always looking for new ideas to help the ferrets, and these meetings are seldom boring (but our activities are no secret to those who attend: come and be amused!)

Ferretting 101 will be starting up the first of the year, come join us in our efforts to educate the public about our favorite pets. Veterinarians are also welcome, and their input necessary to our continued efforts at education. While I have no intention of leaving MaFF once I step down as president, trained veterinary help would make necessary tasks such as compiling the veterinary referral list and the surveys of the various towns much easier.

So, as I leave, I hope for enthusiastic members of our organization to step forward and take the reins for the next year.

—Karen

The Fuzzy Papers

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MaFF at the Boston Pet Expo

by Tracey Goodwin

MaFF volunteers had a fun-filled Halloween weekend at the sixth annual Boston Pet Expo, educating the public about our favorite pets. Special thanks to MaFF volunteers Janice and Joan DeJesus, Jan Fleury, Diane Wood, Livia Harbor, Amy and Jim Robbin, Stephen Nyhan, Richard Brown, Lisaann Darmody, David and Linda Thompson, Kristine Kelley, Jill Northrup, and all the ferrets for helping to make this year's Expo a success.

An extra special thanks to Donna Spirito for bringing the costume for Whitey (MaFF's albino ferret mascot), who participated in the pet costume contest, and to Chrissy Tomkiewicz of *Pets 101* Magazine for allowing her ferrets to visit the MaFF booth (so those of us who did not bring our own ferrets were able to cuddle a fuzzy as we spoke to the public — nothing quite like answering the inevitable "do-they-bite" question by saying that the ferret snoozing gently in your arms is not only obviously quite "tame," but is also not even your own pet!) A big thank-you, too, to Gordon Edgar of CanBrands International for donating two cases of Yesterday's News™ litter samples to the MaFF shelters!

ASK DR. KAREN

by Karen Purcell, DVM

Dear Dr. Karen ,
I have a very serious ferret problem. I'm 14 and have had my ferret for about half a year. I just noticed its back legs are limp and it won't walk, just rolls over. It is very limp and won't eat. It's like it just is too tired to move. It's really skinny now and I'm really worried. Please help me, this ferret means so much to me. Please e-mail me back with anything. I'm taking it to the vet tomorrow.

Signed,
—14-year-old ferret-owner

Dear 14-year-old ferret-owner,
I'm printing this question to illustrate a point. Medicine is a hands-on sort of profession, at least the veterinary aspect is and should be. No veterinarian can diagnose a problem with any pet via phone or email. The animal must be seen, examined thoroughly and a discussion had with the owner regarding current and past history. Diagnostic testing such as blood work and x-rays may be needed as well.

While I have no problem giving advice on general issues, questions like this are just not answerable in the forum given by any medical professional. Please seek a visit with a qualified veterinarian in the event of any ferret illness.

Sincerely,
— Dr. Karen

A Question from the Ferret Mailing List (FML)

Dear Dr. Karen,
We're thinking of adopting from a shelter a replacement for Derek but

we've been told that replacing a four year old ferret (Layla is also four) isn't wise. Can anyone tell us why this is so? Are there reasons not to do so? What are the potential problems if we were to find a good replacement? Can a suddenly "widowed" Layla exist OK alone?

What about adding a younger cagemate, of either sex? Problems?
Signed,
—FMLer

Dear FMLer,
Just catching up on the FML when I saw your post. I have had numerous older ferrets over the years, as I tend to adopt 'unadoptables' from the shelter. I have found that adopting a slightly younger ferret (not the bounce of a kit, but not as old either) works best, as it a) provides a healthy companion that is not likely to die first (morbid as that sounds) b) provides the owner with ferrets of different ages so everyone doesn't die at once. I lost 5 ferrets in 9 months last year. I'm trying to avoid the stress on everyone for the future.

I really do recommend having ferrets of different ages in your business. Mine are now 2.5, 3.5 and 4 years old, and the youngest keeps the oldest from getting (too) fat. I plan to add a kit / younger ferret in the spring to continue the mix. I hope this helps anyone suffering from "Ferret math" right now.

Sincerely,
—Dr. Karen

MaFF Joins with iGive.com

by Tracey Goodwin

HERE'S an exciting new way to help MaFF at no cost to you or to us — and just in time for your holiday gift-giving! Become a member of iGive by going to this URL on your Internet Browser:

<http://www.igive.com/html/ssi.cfm?cid=7117&mid=28884>

You can help raise money for Massachusetts Ferret Friends, Inc. (MaFF) by visiting the URL above, registering as a member (all they need is your name, e-mail address and to tell them what your favorite cause is).

You start earning money by viewing ads on the member page or by purchasing products through the shop.iGive mall. The stores include leading online merchants that offer a variety of popular brands and items that we buy all the time anyway. These include books, music, videos, office supplies, toys, clothing, gifts, flowers, and hundreds more products. A nice percentage (2.5% - 12.5%) of everything you buy from any of the iGive.com stores goes to your cause. There is NO COST to either the member or to the organization. All of the donated funds come from advertisers and from iGive's arrangement with their merchant partners.

With each visit to iGive, you'll raise a few cents just for looking. Shop for everyday things in the mall where a hefty percentage (from 2.5% to 12.5%) comes to MaFF! MaFF gets \$2 each for new members, so please go online today and make good things happen!

The Fuzzy Papers

**WRITERS! PHOTOGRAPHERS!
SUBMISSIONS
SOUGHT!**

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 below, 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 &

**Deadlines for Submissions to
Upcoming Issues of
*The Fuzzy Papers***

For the Spring 2000 Issue:
Wednesday, February 16, 2000

For the Summer 2000 Issue:
Tuesday, May 16, 2000

For the Fall 2000 Issue:
Wednesday, August 16, 2000

You may send your submissions to:
MaFF / *The Fuzzy Papers*
PO Box 3123
Wakefield, MA 01880

Madeline's Story

by Janice DeJesus, Gimmee Shelter Ferret Rescue

ON the afternoon of September 18th, I received a call from a woman who had found a ferret in the woods. Upon examining the ferret, I noticed two large tumors and a swollen mouth. She was very hungry and cold, and frightened.

Monday I took Madeline (a name my daughter picked out) to the vet. Madeline is an older ferret and she has a heart murmur. She had every possibility of not making it through the surgery which she so obviously needed...

Weeks later Madeline is trotting around my house with several shaved areas on her little body (we found more tumors), some sutures still in, half of her tail, a drain for the mass in her cheek, and a personality as loving as no other creature I have ever known.

I have left out so many of the heartaches of her story and Madeline's incredible will to live. She actually stopped breathing on the table during her second surgery, seemed to have to redefine her sense of balance after she lost half of her tail (due to one of the tumors), but she never lost her sense of lovingness.

My only unanswered question is WHY? Why and HOW could anyone possibly be so cruel to a creature so sweet as to put her in the woods to starve, be frightened, be cold, or be killed by another animal? There is no excuse good enough. Does anyone out there recognize Madeline? Can anyone tell me how she ended up in the woods in Hanson, Massachusetts? I really need to understand: *WHY?* ☐



At Left: Madeline before her surgery. Tumors are visible at the base of her tail and on her side, near her left paw.



Above: Madeline resting cozy, warm, and safe following her surgery. At Left: Madeline (the drain still in her face, but "all better") — gives grateful ferrety kisses to Janice's daughter, Joan.

Izzy's Story

by Jo Fowler, Luv of Ferrets Shelter & Rescue

MY waiting list was extremely long, having some 15 surrendering parties on it with as many as 25 or more ferrets who were in need of shelter for one reason or another. Izzy and Cupid were nowhere near the top of the list, but their human kept calling regularly to see if they were getting closer to the top. He was calling so frequently that I could tell he and his family no longer had the commitment to keep and care for the fur kids as part of their family. I began to get concerned for the fur kids, so I allowed their human to come to the top of the list and bring Izzy and Cupid into the shelter.

The human dad came with his three human children who wanted to say a final goodbye to the fur kids. When the dad brought the carrier into the house that had Izzy and Cupid in it, I could see through the grate a very lovely young pair of fur children. Izzy was a very feminine Silver Mitt and Cupid was a very handsome Sable.

Izzy had been a Christmas present for the children only last Christmas and Cupid was a Valentine's Day gift this year: 1999. Izzy would only be one year old in November and Cupid would be one year in December.

As I was speaking with the human dad he let the ferrets out of their carrier and much to my horror I saw a very beautiful young, otherwise healthy looking female ferret, Izzy, dragging her hind legs across the floor. She could not put them under her to hold her weight, yet she showed no sign of pain. But upon examination I felt a huge lump across her shoulder blades. Cupid, on the other hand, was fine ... thank goodness.

I asked the dad how long Izzy had been like this. His reply was rather vague and matter of fact, saying that

he had "just noticed it a day or so ago." I was heartbroken — if only I had taken them in sooner, this might not have happened. I questioned the children to see if they could shed any light on when they first saw Izzy dragging her hind legs. They did not seem to know when it had started or why it had started.

I feared the worst, having been through a rare spinal cancer last year, where the ferret did not survive. I rushed Izzy to the shelter vet for examination and diagnosis. He took x-rays



Izzy having a bit of ferret fun at Luv of Ferrets: peeking out of her tent and nosing a toy. Is this "ferrety heaven" or what?!

that showed her spine had been fractured. The x-rays indicated the injury had not been recent (and this was not good news for her prognosis). Our shelter vet, Dr. Brust, put Izzy on a treatment of Pedipred™ to relieve swelling. After her first dose of meds I kept Izzy in her cage for an hour, then allowed her out with her cagemate Cupid. Much to my surprise and delight, Izzy had all four legs under her! She was walking, even running, in play with Cupid.

It has now been some four weeks, and Izzy is still on her treatment plan, but steadily improving. She runs, climbs cages, dances for joy, tus-

sles with the other ferrets in the shelter, and only every now and again will you see a slight slipping in her rear end, as if her front half wanted to go in one direction and her back half in another. I guess she will always be considered handicapped, but that does not dampen her spirit or her zest for the enjoyment of life.

I am so grateful that I got Izzy soon after her accident (possibly a recliner crushed her spine) because with the immediate care, love, and treatment she received, she will enjoy a wonderful quality of life in someone's home and family. Izzy is a treasure to have and enjoy, not to mention her cagemate Cupid, who is just a most perfect boy.

I am grateful that I was there and able to help when it was needed, and I thank my shelter vet, Dr. Brust for his concern and treatment of Izzy. I also thank Izzy's human dad because he donated an extra \$40 towards her care. That \$40 paid for her x-rays which diagnosed her problem. I also thank Izzy, because she has a zest for life — she never complains or showed pain. She loves everything and everyone; she made and makes me smile knowing that she is doing so very well. And whoever adds Izzy and Cupid to their family will be ever blessed with smiles and happiness from these two fur children.

Izzy will always need to be protected so she does not re-injure herself. Her back is fragile, but the love and enjoyment she will give her new family will far outweigh any special consideration that might be extended to her.

Thank you, Izzy, for letting me help you and enjoy your company while you are here in the Luv of Ferrets Shelter & Rescue.

[UPDATE: Izzy and Cupid went to their new home as a pair on Monday, November 8th. Their new dad is Ryan Binney of Norwood.] □

A Court Case? Almost!

by Janice DeJesus, Gimmee Shelter Ferret Rescue

IN June, a woman brought a ferret to me with plans to give it up to the shelter. We had been in contact for several weeks. Upon arrival, she decided to inform me that the ferret had a medical problem. It had been one and a half years the ferret had a swollen vulva. The ferret was only about 3 or 4 years old. I explained that I could not take on another surgical case, but if she took care of the problem I would help her find a home for the ferret. Apparently the woman has a very good job and her husband owns a business, and so there was zero financial hardship involved. Already in the shelter we had 3 ferrets awaiting surgery for adrenals. The woman left and took the ferret with her.

About an hour and a half later, a young man called the animal hospital to report he had found a ferret in the area. I went to the animal hospital to pick up the ferret he was bringing there. When he arrived, I was shocked to see the very same ferret the

woman had brought for surrender but then had taken away earlier that day!

At that point, I took the ferret, but I was utterly confused, thinking it must be a joke or maybe an elaborate plan to get the ferret into the shelter. I went home and called the woman who had been in with her ferret and told her I would take her ferret after all, just to see what she would say. She told me that she had found it a home, but refused to give me the name or telephone number of the new owner. This was so suspicious that I called the MSPCA Law Enforcement and left a message describing what I suspected. My husband at this point advised me to write down every detail of the event.

Three months later — after ultrasounds and surgery with a diagnosis of carcinoma — we had our day in court. However, as usual, ignorance prevailed and the lawyer insisted the accused felt she was releasing her ferret “to a beautiful new life” and never

knew a ferret could not live in the wild! Yes, she got away with this, her only penalty being reimbursing us for the surgery. But at least she had to hire a lawyer, miss work, and — hopefully — lose a little sleep over what she had done.

Little Padme — which is the name my daughter gave her — now resides in Falmouth in a loving foster home with her foster Mom Janice Santos, along with another ferret who is terminally ill and another recovering from a second adrenal surgery. Padme loves her sisters, although she has turned out to be quite a little instigator. She loves to start trouble, but when one of her “siblings” gives her grief back, she screams and runs to her Mom. She seems very happy and it is very hard to believe she is terminal. Dr. Gould did a great job with her right adrenal, her vulva is down to normal and all her fur has grown back. I am so thankful that Padme now has a loving home in which to spend the remainder of her life.

Despite the way this all turned out, I would do it all again in the hopes we could get just one step further or educate just one more person. □

MaFF Needs a Shelter Liaison

by Catherine Bell, MaFF Shelter Committee Chairperson

THE MaFF Shelter Committee is working to establish a network of volunteers to work closely with local MSPCA and Animal Rescue League Shelters, as well as other shelters who want our help, and to place unwanted ferrets into the MaFF shelter system while good homes are found for them. The Shelter Liaison would be the person coordinating these volunteers and working with the shelter operators to place and transport ferrets from these other shelter systems. Here is a job description:

The Shelter Liaison will —

1. Establish and maintain contact with the MSPCA and ARL shelters in Massachusetts.
2. Coordinate transportation of ferrets from outside shelters to MaFF shelters.
3. Work closely with the shelter operators to help screen ferrets at outside shelters, and stay informed about slots available within the shelter system.
4. Attend Shelter Committee meetings.
5. Be the contact person listed for shelter systems to call about transferring or caring for ferrets.

Anyone interested in volunteering for this position, or for one of the other volunteer positions in this network, should contact Catherine Bell for further information.

The Adventures of MacLeod MacFerret

Episode 3: A Day in Forest Park

by Barbaralee Baron

I knew it was going to be a good day when I woke up this morning. After the usual morning routine — you know: stretch, roll out of the hammock, use the potty, look out the door to see if anyone's around — Mom picked me up, and she had my harness in her hand. The only time this happens is when we are going somewhere. I was in the mood to go explore. Taz was running around all excited, too.

Watching the world go by (and it's a big world to someone my size) always fascinates me. Because I'm wearing my harness, Mom lets me ride on the dashboard of the car. It's nice to lie in the sun. We pulled onto a long tar road that had lots of big trees on each side of it. Mom found a place in what humans call a "parking lot," under a nice shady tree.

The moment I was on the ground I wanted to explore. The ground beneath me felt funny. It had this green stuff sticking up through it. "Funny carpet," I thought. I slid through it and it felt soft and cool. Then we were up and walking. There were lots of neat smells: not only the funny carpet (which I learned later is called "grass"), but also the trees and the flowers ... and the ZOO! We couldn't go in there, because they only allow humans. No pets. Bummer.

This place Mom called a "Park." The best thing as we walked down a hill was the big bathtub of water. The thing is called a "Duck Pond." There was water as far as I could see. It smelled good. I tried walking over to it, but Mom held tight to my leash. I kept trying, though. In the water were these funny looking things with long necks and feathers and big webbed feet. Mom called them "geese." I tell you, they make a loud noise. I

watched them float around in the water, and I kept trying to go swim to them for a closer look, but as usual Mom wouldn't let me go. Humans never let us ferrets have any fun!

After the duck pond, Mom put me on this funny piece of wood that had chains on both sides. She called it a "swing." I liked it. She let me swing back and forth. It was neat. Taz was too big for the swing. Then we went to get this cold sweet thing called "ice cream." Mom shared hers with both me and Taz. It was good! Humans came up to us and asked what I was, and if I bite. Mom explained that I was a ferret and that I don't bite. Why would I bite? Humans don't taste very good. We walked around some more, and then it was time to go home. Good thing, because I was exhausted. The Park is a big place. I fell asleep on the way home dreaming of the duck pond. □

Next Time:
More MacLeod Adventures

MaFF @ Tufts!

by Bill Williamson

MaFF was at the Tufts Veterinary School's annual fair and open house this year on September 18th. MaFF members Ronnie DiComo, Tracy Goodwin, Lisa Wagner, and Bill Williamson volunteered their time to help set up and run the table. This was the third year that MaFF has been invited back to participate in the fair and open house. We again located not far from the Teddy Bear Clinic, which is always visited by many with their 'sick' stuffed animal friends.

Volunteers continued to notice increased acceptance this year of ferrets as pets, as well as much curiosity about them. Quite unlike the first year, when ferrets and their owners were seen as somewhat different: this year many visitors had ferrets or knew others with ferrets and were looking for specific advice.

We hope that we can participate again next year in this important annual event. If you have not yet volunteered to help with a MaFF event, this might be the place you'd like to start! □



MaFF volunteer Ronnie DiComo (left) shows a ferret to a young visitor at the open house.

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the Present . . . Join the MaFF NOW!***

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