

Symposium In Australia Focused On Ferrets

Ferret enthusiasts gathered in Melbourne, Australia, this month to share ferret information.

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Dr. Dave Neck presented talks on blockages and cardiomyopathy in ferrets at the 1st Ferret Health Symposium in Australia.

Ferret information flowed freely between 41 ferret enthusiasts in Melbourne, Australia, on May 3 and May 4 during the 1st Ferret Health Symposium. Attendees even included veterinarians from Canada and Western Australia.

"Without a doubt, the highlight of the symposium was the almost immediate camaraderie between all attendees," said Shirley Hewett, an organizer of the event and one of the founders of the International Ferret Congress Australia. "Connections were made and lifetime friendships were forged between ferret folk from all over Australia and abroad. Another highlight was Dr. Dave Neck from Western Australia, who proved to be a charismatic — and very handsome — presenter."

The birth of the IFC Australia began in 2005 when Hewett attended the International Ferret Congress Symposium in St Louis. Linda Iroff, an IFC co-founder, asked Hewett about starting an Australian branch of the IFC.

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A few ferrets were permitted to attend the symposium for purposes of demonstration — and Jaikoy the ferret had no trouble demonstrating his love for natural snacks.

The popularity of ferrets as pets is on the rise in Australia, but most information about the pets was coming from the United States — and the ferret information didn't always apply to Australian ferrets, Hewett said. Recognizing a need, she forged ahead to form the IFC Australia. "I found that Shona Whaite shared my views on ferret husbandry — feeding as close as possible to a natural diet and no caging — so we formed the IFCA together in the hope that we could encourage more ferret folk to consider keeping their ferrets 'naturally' and so prevent many of the ailments with which the U.S. ferret seems to be beset."

Hewett said attendees especially seemed to enjoy the friendships formed and the food at the symposium. Finding the right venue was one of the biggest challenges for the event, because it took place in eastern Australia and organizers live on the other side of the country. "We were limited to searching the 'net for sites and were not able to physically view prospective venues," she said. "We do not have sponsors but wanted to keep the symposium affordable for ferret owners, so cost of the venue certainly limited our choices."

Plans are already underway for another symposium to take place in about 18 months, perhaps in Sydney.