

Teaching A Deaf, Biting Ferret To Be Gentle

How can you train a ferret that's deaf?

By Ailigh Vanderbush

Posted: August 29, 2008, 6 p.m. EDT

Q: I have read about bite-training ferrets, and it seems that sound is a very important part of training a ferret not to bite. My ferret, Milo, was born deaf and is now about 2 1/2 years old. He is a very good boy except for the fact that he nips (sometimes pretty hard) when he is playing. Unfortunately, he doesn't just chew on me but he also nips others. My attempts at scruffing, time-outs, cutting his playtime short and even trying to teach him hand gestures have been unsuccessful. How can I teach my deaf ferret to be gentler?

A: One of the most common issues in working with a deaf ferret is that they do not always know where you are in the room nor do they hear you coming, so they are often startled. This may be part of Milo's issues when playing. He simply doesn't know where you are.

1. Instead of hand gestures, because a ferret can't usually see very well, train Milo to recognize a visual cue, like a flashlight or laser pointer. Reward Milo each time he comes out to investigate the light.
2. Make sure Milo knows where you are. You can do this by stomping on the ground or touching the cage before you touch him. If your ferret is asleep, lightly blow on his fur before you wake him.
3. If you continue to scruff him, make sure he can see your face then shake your head and look at him disapprovingly. When your ferret calms down, place him back on the floor.
4. If you keep using hand signals, make sure your ferret can see you and keep the signals consistent.
5. Like any ferret, make sure he is getting enough exercise and playtime out of his cage. An overexcited or underexercised ferret can bite because it is unable to contain its excess energy.