

Ferret Suddenly Bites Ears

Why would a female ferret suddenly begin biting a male ferret's ears?

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Posted: October 1, 2008, 5 a.m. EDT

Q: I have two young ferrets, one boy and one girl, both around the age of 4 months. We bought them together, but I am unsure if they are related in some way. They live together. They play together as normal but have the occasional fights over food. Over the last few weeks, the jill has been biting the hob's ears to the point where they bleed, and he squeals as if he is in pain. The hob is usually healthy and eats normally. Is this biting behavior normal for ferrets? If not, what could be the cause and how can we prevent it?

A: Assuming that they are spayed and neutered, my guess is that they are reaching adolescence when this behavior is common, especially in ferrets that are weaned early. Ear biting can either be a substitute for nursing or it can be normal grooming that got out of hand. Biting during play is normal, although biting to the point of blood or pain is a little inappropriate.

If the ear is injured, separate the ferrets and allow any open wound to heal. Then use Bitter Apple (or another similar product) on his ears when you place them back together. Products like Bitter Apple should only be used on the outside of the ear. The product deters licking or biting because of its bitter taste.

The jill may grow out of this or the male may decide to fight back to stop her from biting him.

If the ferrets are not altered, then you are seeing some sexual behavior, and I suggest neutering and spaying as soon as possible. Also, ear-biting or other aggressive behavior in an older ferret may be a sign of adrenal disease and requires a visit to your ferret-knowledgeable veterinarian.