

Andrew & The Black-Footed Ferrets

A young boy named Andrew turns an adventure on the prairie into a fundraising book to benefit black-footed ferrets.

By Rebecca Stout

Posted: May 30, 2008, 7 p.m. EDT

Courtesy of Pronghorn Productions
Andrew Licht wrote the book *The Ferret Capture* when he was only 9 years old.

"Vvvvvroomm! The car started up, it was 8:00 Saturday night, October 3, 2006. My dad, a wildlife biologist, had to help capture black-footed ferrets so I came along to help out." And so began the ferrety adventure of a lifetime for 9-year-old Andrew Licht, as written in his book, *The Ferret Capture*. You read that right, this young boy from South Dakota wrote, illustrated and published a book.

An Experience Worth Writing About

An absolutely adorable piece of work, the children's book details the experience that Andrew shared with his father, Dan Licht, on a trip to the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands ferret recovery site (also known as the Conata Basin). His father, a wildlife biologist with the National Park Service, enjoyed spotlighting black-footed ferrets for several nights and brought along young Andrew and his brother Brady one night.

The purpose of spotlighting black-footed ferrets, which are nocturnal, is to capture them to administer necessary health shots and to implant tracking devices in order to study them. This is done as part of the Black-Footed Ferret Recovery Program, which helps the endangered species survive through captive breeding and reintroduction. The spotlighting trip provided a meaningful experience for Andrew and was a huge departure from his typical activities such as video gaming, playing *Dungeons and Dragons*, hiking and playing with the family dog.

Courtesy of Pronghorn Productions

Andrew Licht also provided illustrations for his book about black-footed ferrets.

Shortly after his exciting night with his father, Andrew's fourth grade teacher gave her class a writing assignment. Andrew chose to write about his experience with black-footed ferrets and received an A for the impressive project. Andrew's father then set out to publish it. The first half of the book comprises the story of that fateful night as told by Andrew. The second part of the book includes facts that Andrew researched on his own. Adding to the charm of the book is the fact that it is illustrated by Andrew and his father contributed the photographs. A portion of the proceeds go to Prairie Wildlife Research, which support the Black-Footed Ferret Recovery Program. Travis M. Livieri, executive director and founder of Prairie Wildlife Research, purchased a large number of the books. One of each book is included in the optional BFF's Kid's Kit when a ferret is adopted through their program. The book also can be purchased through Amazon.com.

Dan Licht explained that his son's contribution to the welfare of the animals has been mostly through public awareness. The book is currently receiving a lot of attention that in turn brings attention to the black-footed ferret, which is often overlooked by the federal government. The book reaches out to people across the country who have little to no knowledge about one of the rarest mammals in the United States and helps to portray them in a positive light. "He [Andrew] got a letter from our lone U.S. Congressperson, Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, congratulating him on the book," Dan Licht proudly said. "I had the opportunity to talk to one of her staffers recently, and he assured me that she personally wrote the letter."

Who Is This Little Boy?

Shelley Lynn Licht, Andrew's mother, said that her son's active participation in the community is not limited to this one act to help black-footed ferrets. The youngster has a habit of taking action. "Two years ago the Black Hills area was considering a zoo in this area, and the Black Hills Zoological Society ran an ad in the paper for people to write if they were interested. Andrew made a posterboard-sized card and had all of his classmates — this was in 3rd grade — sign the card and say why they thought there should be a zoo. The card ended up hanging in the mayor's office; as a result, one of the involved local vets brought a few snakes and small mammals to Andrew's school. At this date, the zoo is still a dream."

Today, Andrew is 11 years old and although he is very active in a program at school for the gifted, he is still very much a little boy. "He is very knowledgeable about animals, trust me, I have no idea what he is talking about half the time," said Brady, his brother. "He is overall a very hyperactive little boy who manages to always get dirty from playing outside, but he

is my brother and he is the only one I got.”

Andrew’s mother adds further insight about her son. “Sometimes Andrew forgets to do things in the morning — like eat breakfast, put on his shoes — but I truly believe he’s thinking about more important things!”

More Adventures & Dreams To Come

Andrew looks forward to many more ventures of his own as well as adventures with his father. “Dan includes the boys in his work whenever possible if it’s something that will be of interest to them,” Shelley Lynn Licht said. “I think they’re very fortunate to have the opportunities that they do. The ferret capture was a cool adventure, but one of many that they have been on with their dad. This last summer they went on safari in South Africa with their dad for two weeks, and one of Andrew’s favorite stories is how he got chased by a monkey.”

Andrew’s father plans on taking him out for more spotlighting on the prairie this summer. Although Andrew enjoys reading about the black-footed ferrets in the numerous nature books he brings home, he loves the idea of seeing them again even more because after all, “They’re cute and fluffy.” What bright-eyed little boy wouldn’t enjoy seeing one of nature’s magical habitats lit up in the night to see some of the rarest creatures that inhabit North America?

The real question is, how many of those boys are caring and gifted enough to write a book about it, and then in turn use some of the proceeds to help the very same animals that enchant him. Aside from his future trip to chase the bandits of the night, he has a wide array of plans for the more distant future. “I could be a wildlife biologist,” he said. He brings up the subjects of zoo keeping, falconry, writing and being a cartoonist on occasion as well. He let me in another interesting dream of his, “I want to own a domestic ferret when I grow up.” So many dreams, so little time.

To see all Ferret Superstars columns, [click here](#)>>

Rebecca Stout resides in rural Tennessee with her husband, two sons and beloved pets. Ferrets have been in her heart and life for 30 years. She enjoys writing, photography, animals and being a strong advocate for her autistic son. To visit her website, [click here](#)>>