

Animals Find A Safe Haven At The Critter Camp

More than two dozen ferrets and 29 other species live at this special animal sanctuary in Illinois.

By Rebecca Stout

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Courtesy of Critter Camp

Beth Randall and her family operate The Critter Camp, a sanctuary for exotic pets that need a home.

It's no secret to ferret owners that these adorable little animals possess a magic that often leads them to opening their minds and hearts to a wide variety of unexpected things in life. When ferrets move into your home, they burrow their way into your soul, and they bring love with them. So much love, in fact, that it changes you. It changes your idea of what a home could be. Should be. A sanctuary. A place of love. Never has this been more true than in the case of Beth Randall, owner and operator of a one-of-a-kind exotic pet rescue, The Critter Camp, in German Valley, Illinois. It was founded upon the love of two foundling ferrets. Life has never been the same for Randall and her family ever since. Fortunately, it's also changed for anyone who passed through their doorway.

A Home For The Homeless

Randall is a mother of four, two daughters and two sons (one with special needs). She has always enjoyed the company of pets in her life. One day, she took in a ferret named Anastasia along with her friend Ferri. Once the family opened its heart beyond a menagerie of mainstream pets, people started calling Randall about other exotic animals in need, assuming Randall could help.

Knowing that no place existed that would take in unusual animals, Randall found herself unable to say no when people alerted her to an animal in need. Word quickly spread. Later, there were knocks at the door from curious people. "Can I pet the fennec fox?" "Can I see your ferret room?" The numbers of rescues quickly increased, so the family made the decision to do rescue work officially and became licensed. The Critter Camp works hard to re-home potential residents, but, as a last resort, it is a safe haven to unwanted, homeless, sick and/or unadoptable animals.

When lost little souls do find their way to the Critter Camp, they find themselves in a unique place indeed. They are given the best of housing, first-rate vet care (sometimes on site), up to 20 volunteers and staff members to tend to them, and as much individual attention and love as Randall and her family can muster. Best of all, Critter Camp shares its expertise in exotic animal care and advocacy with the community. It provides educational presentations to local areas and offers hands-on tours several times a week.

Courtesy of Critter Camp

Flash the fennec fox is one of more than 30 species that call Critter Camp home.

Take The Tour

After an introduction to the facility outside and some preparation, folks are invited in for a tour. First, they might see Shadow, the arctic marble fox. The barn houses guinea pigs, bunnies and more. In the upstairs apartment, visitors see iguanas, bearded dragons and other lizards. Afterward, they make way to the main home where each and every room is a sanctuary dedicated to a different species.

Upon entering the main part of the facility, which is also Randall's home, people are greeted by excited animals wagging their tails, including dogs, cats, and a favorite character named Flash, the fennec fox. The sounds of voices and songs from various parrots fill the home. The tour is a very intimate experience. People witness the gentleness of the beardies, play peek-a-boo with a macaw named Jackson, cuddle a degu, touch an adorable sugar glider, Ooh and Aah over kinkajous, admire tortoises and snakes, and feel everything from the soft skin of a hairless rat to the prickles of a hedgehog. The grand finale is the ferret room, where more than two dozen ferrets roam free.

"I warn people of poo near the door, and we all go in," Randall said. "I also warn of any that may be hiding in sleep sacks on the floor — we keep them away from the door though — and I pick up a few ferrets for them to hold and play with." Randall does lock up one ferret that is known to bite; she endured a rough life before arriving at the Critter Camp. After playing with the ferrets, the tour heads downstairs and uses hand sanitizer.

"I answer more questions and give them informational handouts," Randall said. "Of course, all along the way I tell them about each animal — where they are from in the wild, how long they've been pets here in the United States, if they make

good pets, the care they need, etc.”

Critter Camp In Motion

Check out these videos from the Critter Camp.

Life At Critter Camp

The Ferret Room

Tribute To The Staff

Critter Camp

A Dream For Green

By keeping her fingers on the pulse of the local community and the exotic pet community at large, Randall draws support from as far away as Singapore. Today, Critter Camp is home to more than 240 animals of 30 different species. A lack of space prevents it from taking in any more ferrets, but the future seems bright. Because of the worldwide support, Critter Camp is very close to realizing its dream, and a stand-alone facility is currently slated to be built. Randall has meticulously made sure that everything is ready to go for when this phenomenal new facility is finished. But there is still much to accomplish financially.

Despite the obstacles ahead, Randall is enthusiastic. “A building contractor and labor are already completely donated. We just need a sponsor or major contributor to get the ball rolling!” The building, which could house as many as 665 residents, will be “green.” This means it will leave a minimal footprint in the environment. The ferret room will be built to optimize the most hygienic/sterile environment as possible for the ferrets while also providing all the comforts of home with multi-level cages, ferret condos, toys, bedding, hideouts and a plexiglass wall set back by guard rails to keep visitors from disturbing the animals as they view them. To see the blueprints, plans and details about this one-of-a-kind “green” building, visit the sanctuary plans section of the Critter Camp website.

Courtesy of Critter Camp

Cassandra Randall is in charge of the ferret room and has fond memories of Anastasia, the first ferret they took in.

Two Ferrets To Remember

It’s beyond imagination that just two, tiny, little furry clowns started it all. Randall’s daughter Cassandra, who is the main caregiver of the ferrets, muses about this. “While I love all of them and make a point to give each ferret attention, the first ferret we took in will always hold a special place in my heart.”

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>>](#)