

## Generosity Spurs Ferret Enthusiasts To Give Gifts

**The generosity of ferret enthusiasts and the gifts they give inspire awe and thankfulness.**

*By Alexandra Sargent-Colburn*

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Through the years, ferret enthusiasts with a generous spirit have sent gifts to Alexandra Sargent-Colburn and her ferrets.

One lesson that I keep learning over and over again as the years pass is that ferret enthusiasts are remarkably generous. It is a generosity of spirit among a group of people who often do not have two nickels to rub together. Ferret shelter operators, especially, carry heavy veterinary bills. They seem to be in perpetual debt, although they would be the first to tell you that they are rich in intangible things: the satisfaction of providing a safe home to ferrets that had none, and the knowledge that they have truly made a difference in an often cold and indifferent world. When these people spend, they have to spend very wisely indeed. From my perspective, the gift of a dollar from a ferret shelter operator is akin to the gift of 10 dollars from anyone else!

Yet they do give gifts freely, as do ferret enthusiasts in general. Over the years, I have amassed a large collection of gifts from ferret enthusiasts. What is truly striking about the collection is how personalized it is. A lot of thought went into these gifts. They are not the sort of generic goods that you can easily re-gift in a pinch when you have forgotten a distant relative's birthday!

Most of my gift collection has come from members of the Ferret Mailing List (FML). The FML is an online community of ferret enthusiasts that I have belonged to for a number of years. I recommend it highly. Not only is it a good forum for meeting other ferret enthusiasts, it has a lot of practical information regarding the care of our furry friends. I suspect that a number of you reading this today are already familiar with it. I have also gotten a few gifts from people who only know me from the print version of Ferrets magazine, and its new online version that you are reading now. Regardless of the source, I have to say that when it comes to gifts, you folks have spoiled me rotten! My ferrets, too.

### Unique Ferret Gifts

Probably the most common gift that I receive is ferret bedding; specifically, bedding with a John Deere theme. I wrote a number of little stories on the FML about ferrets flying a magically modified John Deere tractor. The stories are a lot of fun to write, and it is a lot of fun when a cardboard box addressed to the ferrets comes in the mail with a bit of John Deere bedding inside. Some of it over the years has been rough-looking and very hand-made. Some of it has been made by ladies who make and sell bedding for a living. Regardless, it is all beautiful to my eyes and the ferrets appreciate it, too. My favorite is probably the bedding with glow-in-the-dark highlights. What's not to love? Some of the bedding has been made by ladies who are no longer with us, and I remember them with great affection every time I hold these things in my hands.

I have received wonderful, quirky gifts, too. A purple fleece sleep sack decorated with black bats for my ferret Sabrina, the Bat-Biter. She loved that sack! Tiny chocolate hedgehogs with hazelnut filling to commemorate my love for France, the Fricken' Pigmy Hedgehog. A tiny, black bowl sculpted as a hedgehog that I use as a salt-cellar. Several pairs of John Deere tennis socks from an anonymous donor. A small ceramic crock that I use every day to keep my ferret Todd out of the butter. Ferret Christmas ornaments. Angel pins. Brownies at Christmas from a good friend. (You know who you are!) And recently, I have been receiving bags of ferret kibble in the mail from an anonymous donor that I call "The Kibble Fairy." Thank you, whoever you are!

One gift actually made me break down and cry. My husband and I were going through a very tough financial time. I was e-mail chatting with a ferret lady, and I mentioned that I didn't have enough money on hand to buy milk for my coffee. Well, the next thing I knew this lady put a little cash into my PayPal account. And don't think that she was rich! She wasn't, except in the abundance of her spirit. Our bad patch passed, and I held onto that money until the day that I stumbled across someone who was having their own bad patch. I felt blessed to be able to pass on that money, positively blessed.

I have long felt blessed in my friendships with ferret enthusiasts. My friends, you are the greatest gift of all.

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Alexandra Sargent-Colburn lives in Massachusetts with fish, ferrets, a cat, a husband and a neurotic dog. The ferrets are in charge.