

Focus On The Dook Nook Ferret Shelter

Jackie Hawley of the Dook Nook Ferret Shelter in Florida shares the triumphs and tragedies of her 13 years rescuing ferrets.

By Troy Lynn Eckart

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Courtesy of Jackie Hawley

Poopsie is one of the ferrets waiting to be adopted from the Dook Nook Ferret Shelter.

Jackie Hawley's ferret shelter, the Dook Nook , is 13 years old. "It took a while to realize I was a rescue/shelter," she said.

Since first opening, this ferret shelter in Florida has rescued approximately 600 ferrets. The average number of ferrets in the shelter is around 34, but it has reached quite a few more at times and was once as low as eight.

Success, Rewards & Sadness

Hawley said her greatest ferret-related success was contributing to the rescue of some of the Utah ferrets back in 2001. The Dook Nook took in 38 ferrets from that rescue, and many of those ferrets were sick with one or more of the following ailments: Coccidia, dehydration, heart disease, tumors and adrenal disease.

The ferrets were starved for attention and food. "When I'd fill the food bowl they would get up to eat right then, as if they were afraid there wouldn't be any food for a while," Hawley said. "One little guy would actually bark at any other ferret that would try to get to the same food bowl. Every month for a year we had an adrenal surgery. As the kids healed and gained muscle tone they went on to their forever homes, except for a few hospice kids. As sad as it is to let them go, it's very rewarding to know they're getting lots more attention than we as a shelter can provide."

Hawley's most rewarding ferret case was Penny. This female ferret was found in the parking lot of a local veterinarian, nearly dead. She was so thin that her skin sunk between her ribs and she had a scar on the top of her head. Hawley could only get small amounts of soup into her every hour or two, and was afraid to go to sleep for fear Penny would soil herself and be unable to move out of the mess. Hawley took 15- to 20-minute catnaps for about a week until Penny ate enough and gained strength.

Hawley also exercised Penny's back legs six to eight times a day for two weeks after her arrival. When Penny was finally able to stand on the floor, Hawley realized that the ferret was blind. "Sadly, too many ferrets come in like this," Hawley said.

Hawley's saddest case was a ferret that was brought to her totally covered with fleas. Despite all her efforts, he died of flea anemia. "It was so frustrating because there are products available to prevent this," Hawley said. "People need to know that, untreated, fleas are deadly for ferrets."

Courtesy of Jackie Hawley

Sugar is also waiting for adoption and would prefer to be in a single ferret home.

Courtesy of Jackie Hawley

Honey is sister to Sugar and would like to be adopted into a home as an only ferret.

The Ferret Shelter Routine

A typical day at the Dook Nook Ferret Shelter starts at 8 a.m., dishing out various medicines in soup bowls and feeding the ferrets. Then their room is cleaned, and the kibble they threw around during the night is vacuumed up. The old ferrets come out for the day, play for a little while, then find their favorite sleeping places. Two groups of two rotate free time in a back room because they don't get along with other ferrets. A single female ferret that hates other ferrets gets her playtime alone all night in the main ferret room. Poopsie and two little albino sisters, Sugar and Honey, would all love a forever home with each as the only ferret.

Almost every day, volunteers or visitors arrive to either help or see the ferrets. Often Hawley nurses a sick ferret for friends. There's always laundry, washing ferret dishes, paperwork, phone calls from across the country with ferret questions and e-mails to answer.

Around 5 or 6 p.m., the goal shifts to getting the ferrets in bed by 9 p.m. After that's finally accomplished, Hawley has



more phone calls and e-mails to attend to, more ferret dishes to wash and more laundry. Lately Hawley has been able to get to bed by midnight instead of 2 a.m. "It seems for quite a few years there was someone who needed soup feedings about every four hours, so I feel good that soup feedings are only twice a day at the moment," Hawley said.

Due to Hawley's age and health issues, the Dook Nook currently only accepts ferrets in extreme emergencies. "It's very hard to say no when I know I can help a sick one or for a temporary situation," Hawley said. The most important needs of the Dook Nook are help with veterinary bills and forever homes for Poopsie, a sweet little ferret that came in as a very bad biter and doesn't like other ferrets; and for Sugar and Honey, two little albino sisters that also don't like other ferrets.

The Ferret Shelter Vet

John Rossi of the Riverside Animal Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida, is the veterinarian who treats the Dook Nook's ferrets.

Words Of Wisdom

Hawley offers this advice to new ferret owners, "Think of ferrets as perpetual 2-year-olds that always look for trouble to get into, and know what's 'normal' for your ferret so you'll recognize an illness early." She said ferret owners should continue learning about ferrets, do research and not be afraid to ask questions.

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Troy Lynn Eckart is the founder of Ferret Family Services, a domestic ferret information, education and welfare public service organization in Kansas.