

Kit Critters Ferrets Ferret Sanctuary

An Illinois ferret rescue becomes a sanctuary for abandoned, unadoptable ferrets.

By Troy Lynn Eckart

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Shelby is a 5-year-old ferret that's suffering from both adrenal gland disease and insulinoma.

Photos Courtesy Kit Crider

After receiving a melatonin implant, Shelby's fur grew back.

Kit Critters Ferrets ferret sanctuary began as a ferret rescue in 2005 when Jack and Kit Crider's son was in an accident, and they purchased two ferrets to keep him company as he healed. They researched ferrets and found out how much help the ferret community needed. The first two ferret rescues arrived at their Illinois home in July 2005. And the rescue grew from there.

Kit said the total number of ferrets taken in were too many to count. "I am not sure what happened in 2006, but we took in over 21 ferrets that year alone. My numbers got to 50 June of 2008. That's when I had to stop rescuing." The bad economy and lack of money forced the rescue to become a sanctuary.

Currently, Kit Critters Ferrets is home to 29 ferrets that will live out their lives at the sanctuary.

But Kit's ferret tasks aren't limited to caring for the ferrets at the shelter. "I talk to the public about basic care for ferrets and I educate people that have fuzzies already and are in need of help," Kit said. "Questions are always welcome. I am here to help if I can. I have a website and a way to contact me if more info/education is needed."

Bennie is one of the first two ferrets rescued by the Criders, and he still lives at the sanctuary.

Photos Courtesy Kit Crider

Joey the ferret came to the sanctuary with Bennie, and both were suffering from malnourishment and neglect.

Happy And Sad Ferret Stories

Kit believes the rescue's greatest ferret-related success is a 5-year-old, female ferret named Shelby. Kit said they were told Shelby was only about 11 months old when she arrived at Kit Critters Ferrets.

"We knew quickly she was older," Kit said. "Poor Shelby had been passed around like a trash bag and dumped on just as much. She was so stressed at any changes, she would freak if we moved her cage. So she stayed with us."

Shelby has been with them for two years, and Kit believes the ferret probably only felt good for six months of that time. "Shelby has adrenal cancer and insulinoma. We are treating both diseases."

When Shelby lost all her fur last year, the Criders got her a melatonin implant and all Shelby's fur grew back. "She is very happy now and very content. She knows she will only have one home from now on, and that is with us. She doesn't stress over thinking she is losing her mom."

Perhaps the rescue's most rewarding ferret story is that of Bennie and Joey, the first ferrets rescued by the Criders. Joey has passed on, but Bennie still lives at the sanctuary.

"These two guys were so malnourished and neglected," Kit said. "They lived in their own waste with no blankets or any kind of bedding at all in an 18-inch wide by 2-foot long cage." Both ferrets lacked muscle mass, could barely walk because of overgrown nails and had poor muscle tone. Just a few months after arriving at the rescue, however, both ferrets were putting on weight and beginning to climb. "Joe was one of the most beautiful ferrets I had ever seen, Bennie was the most unusual. Joey looked like he was part angora almost, and Bennie looks like a white and silver wolf. Joey died of insulinoma and Bennie is still hanging in there."

The saddest cases are those that came to Kit Critters Ferrets sick and couldn't be saved. "People have [ferrets], they find out they are sick, and then they dump them on someone else when the ferrets need their ferrants — ferret parents — the most," Kit said. She wants people to know this change is the hardest thing to put a ferret through at the worst time. "The changeover to another household is sometimes what does them in."



Kit hopes people will do research on ferrets. "You can learn so much for them in just a few short minutes."

Life At Kit Critters Ferrets

A typical day for Kit starts at 8:30 a.m. with medications for sick ferrets. The first ferret group then comes out to the playroom — 17 to the large playroom, another to a small playroom, another to the back porch playroom and another group to the living room playroom. While the ferrets play, cages are cleaned. Kit then starts rotating ferrets from one playroom to another, until the ferrets make it to the living room playroom. After each ferret receives a treat, they go back to their clean cages.

All ferrets are out in different playrooms a total of about two to three hours per day. During part of this time, Kit also plays with them, works on the computer and catches up on anything else that needs doing.

At noon, Kit feeds the sick ferrets a special soup for lunch before she continues to do other ferret tasks. Between 5 and 6 p.m., the sick ferrets again get medications and soup. By then, the last of the kids are coming out for the night and all cages are cleaned. The last ferret goes to bed by 7 p.m., although that time can stretch to as late as 10 p.m. if Kit is running behind. Every two weeks is FooFoo day, which is Kit's name for the day all the ferrets get their nails, ears and teeth done.

Kit sees the most important needs for Kit Critters Ferrets being money for veterinary care. She also wishes she had a younger body so she can keep up with all the needs of the aging ferrets at the sanctuary!

Know Your Limits

Kit warns people about ferret math, cautioning them against taking in too many. She also encourages people to research ferrets. "The more you know about ferrets, the easier your life will be." What you learn can also help improve your ferret's health.

Research can prevent unexpected problems. The Critters found they had a problem with house insurance. "We had a hard time finding insurance that would cover us because we owned ferrets. Didn't matter if it was 1 or 100, could not get coverage." She recommends that people talk to officials at the city where they live before adopting a ferret.

Another must? "Always make sure you have a vet that is knowledgeable about ferrets," Kit said. "Vets were a big issue here also." One of Kit's favorite websites to recommend is FerretUniverse.com.

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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.