

The Rezweezil Ferret Rescue And Shelter In Arizona

Clover Williams, operator of the Rezweezil Ferret Rescue And Shelter in Arizona, helps ferrets in need.

By Troy Lynn Eckart

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Photos courtesy Clover Williams

Oscar (top) and Charley are two male ferrets available for adoption at Rezweezils Ferret Rescue And Shelter. A few years ago, after taking in eight ferrets in one month, a ferret shelter operator convinced Clover Williams to register as a rescue with the nonprofit ferret organization Support Our Shelters. Williams' original plan was to work with the only ferret shelter in New Mexico, but it closed within a few months, leaving Williams' Rezweezil Ferret Rescue And Shelter as the only shelter. Some years later, she moved to an isolated part of Arizona and her focus shifted to being a hospice/sanctuary, although she still rescues.

Williams said she's been a low-volume shelter, taking in a little less than 100 ferrets in more than three years. "Only about half of the ferrets coming in have come from within a six-hour, roundtrip drive. Others have been rescued from one to two states away, or have been transferred from other shelters."

"I almost never see ferret people face-to-face," Williams said. "I've never been to a show or event, or even a meeting, and I've only seen a couple of other active shelters. So I'm usually at least a little surprised to get any sort of recognition or validation. Things like a recent check from Club Med Ferrets and this article really do mean a lot to me."

In The Know On Ferrets

Williams recommends that ferret caretakers read and bookmark MiamiFerret.org. She also stressed the importance of good health care. "You need a vet, but you also need to be careful about vets. Many claim to be competent but aren't." She said that novice ferret owners should contact a nearby ferret shelter for advice about veterinarians. "At the very least, find a vet who is willing to consult with more competent veterinarians. And be willing to drive at least a couple of hours each way if that's what it takes."

Health problems don't seem to be the main reason for people to surrender ferrets to the Rezweezil Ferret Rescue And Shelter. Williams believes completely foreseeable life changes, such as going to college or pregnancy, cause the majority of surrenders in her area. "If people would consider these possibilities honestly and responsibly before getting their ferrets, there would be a lot less heartache in the world."

Happy And Sad Ferret Cases

Williams experiences many small, day-to-day rewards as a ferret shelter operator. "It may sound cheesy, but every ferret I can help is rewarding." Her recent case is Noel, a ferret that had two owners in a row and faced being put to sleep for biting. Another ferret shelter operator helped facilitate the transfer of this ferret to Williams. "Turns out, poor Noel reeked of smoke, never had a toy or treat, and was used to being dunked in water for biting."

Although Williams doesn't believe Noel will ever be completely trustworthy, she has stopped biting as a first impulse. "She is also a happy, playful girl who gives kisses and usually enjoys snuggling."

A member of the ferret community gave one of Angie Chappell's snuggle barrels to Noel for Christmas, and Williams saw how secure it made her feel. "I'll be getting more for traumatized ferrets who come in in the future."

She doesn't claim to have any special trick for reforming biting ferrets. "I don't even make a special effort to make them stop," Williams said. "I do try to hold them a lot and be extra gentle to make them less afraid, and that usually ends the biting. But if they want to keep biting me every day, that's fine too. I just love them anyway."

One of Williams' saddest cases was a ferret named Jennifer that died from what she believes was a broken heart. "Her owner really did have to give her up, but she cared about this ferret and checked me out as thoroughly as I check out potential homes. They really loved each other."

The problem began after a few days when Jennifer seemed to realize her owner was gone for good. "She refused to eat, drink or come out of her cage on her own. I force-fed her and sub-q'ed for a month. I slept by her cage and held her and

tried enrichments. I gave her small doses of pred to stimulate appetite and minimize wasting.”

Although Jennifer finally seemed to improve, one day Williams came home from work and found her dead. “If I’d known I couldn’t turn it around, I could have called her owner and arranged visits. I still don’t know what else I could have done, but I’m sure I could have done something, and I missed it. I only know that I’ve never seen a ferret suffer more, or felt so helpless.”

Everyday Ferret Care

A typical day for Williams starts with waking at 5 a.m., putting a couple ferret groups in cages, letting a couple ferret groups out, giving medications, checking food and water, scooping litter, doing e-mail, getting ready for work, putting ferret groups up and mopping. If a ferret is sick, Williams runs home at lunchtime to check on it and give medications.

When she arrives home from work in the evening, the whole cycle repeats. Most nights, Williams cleans a few ferrets’ ears and trims a few ferrets’ nails while watching TV.

On weekends, Williams changes bedding and does a more thorough cleaning. Once a month she gives the medication lupron to ferrets needing it.

Williams does all the shelter work herself. “I have never had any local volunteers. There is a lady trucker who has stopped by a couple of times to play with the gang, and recently a wonderful shelter mom from Nevada came to ferret-sit. She helped potty-train some of my stubborn kids and taught me to draw blood from ferret veins, among other things. That was pretty amazing.”

To help raise funds for the shelter operations, Williams sells bedding through FerretBedding.com, and during Christmas time she lists some of the ferrets on the Ferret Giving Tree. The remaining expenses for the shelter are covered from her own pocket.

Williams drives from Arizona to El Paso, Texas, to see a veterinarian for ferret surgeries. She considers the veterinarian a top surgeon with reasonable prices, but the distance to reach her has her considering switching veterinarians if she can find someone closer who’s just as good.

Adoptable Ferrets

A pair of male ferrets is available for adoption through Rezweezil Ferret Rescue And Shelter. “Oscar and Charley are the most adoptable pair I’ve ever met!” Williams said. “They came in for boarding last year and were abandoned. Beautiful, chubby, playful, healthy, affectionate — they’re just wonderful boys. They’re everything anyone would ever want in ferrets. Most of the other ferrets here beat them up, so they would do best with no other ferrets or with mellow, middle-aged males. They’re completely untraumatized by people, and I want to be careful to keep them that way.” <HOME>

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