

A Day In The Life Of Three Shelter Ferrets

Ferrets Diamond, Sugar and Possum get a second chance at life thanks to ferret shelters.

By Dionne Obeso

Posted: August 1, 2010, 5 a.m. PDT

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Some abandoned ferrets are lucky enough to be taken in by ferret shelters and given a second chance at finding a happy home.

Ferrets require lots of attention. Like toddlers, they are fast, clever and curious — and totally bent on getting into everything within reach, including some things that you were quite sure were actually out of reach. Sadly, some people who adopt ferrets are not prepared for this level of activity and curiosity, and all over the country ferrets are injured or abandoned because an owner didn't do their due diligence in research before they made their pet selection.

Diamond The Ferret's Story

The attraction to the cute, small and furry is probably why Diamond, a 10-month-old, chocolate point ferret, was purchased as a family pet by a woman for her three children. Diamond was allowed free rein of the house rather than being kept caged and safe. One day she went missing, but no one was worried. It wasn't until the next day that they found her wedged into a box spring, gravely injured. The owner took her to the veterinarian before deciding to call Dee Gage of the West Michigan Ferret Connection; she just didn't have the time to give constant care to a very injured ferret.

Although Diamond lost one of her front legs to the injury, she is a cheerful and active ferret today; she has become something of a mascot around the rescue, although she is still available for adoption. Diamond and her companions at the shelter are kept safe and happy in their cages, and a parade of volunteers comes through the shelter to feed and exercise the ferrets every day. The many volunteers use a color-coded clothespin system to show which ferrets have already been cared for and which still need attention for the day.

Sugar The Ferret's Story

The economy also makes this a dangerous time for ferrets. As people lose their homes, they often need to get rid of their pets, and some people believe that if they leave their ferret behind when they leave their home, the ferret will be found quickly and adopted. That is, sadly, not always the case. Sugar was one of these abandoned ferrets. She was discovered in an empty apartment, locked in her cage, with no food.

The 2-year-old ferret was brought to Diane Wall of South Shore Ferret Care in Massachusetts, where she was quickly offered food and water. Each morning the ferrets there are fed and then let out of their cages for around two hours at a time in small groups, based on which ferrets get along best with which. While they have their playtime, their cages are cleaned and their bedding nicely fluffed. Any ferret that is discovered to be sick, not eating or otherwise ailing gets special time with Wall. In the evening, the ferrets are allowed out to play for another three to five hours before lights out.

Sugar didn't have long to get used to her routine, though. After less than two weeks at the rescue, she was adopted out to a loving and ferret-experienced family. Although her circumstances began tragically and could have ended in disaster, she has found happiness with a new and wonderful family.

Possum The Ferret's Story

Possum is another ferret that had some family trouble when she started out. Her family called Brenda Johnson of New York's Lakeroad Ferret Farm Rescue/Shelter to ask for help with her sudden biting problem. The almost 2-year-old ferret was biting members of the family hard and painfully, but the behavior was new and disturbing to her owners.

After several weeks of phone conversations with the family, Johnson was contacted by a veterinarian with a request for advice on the same problem. The two quickly worked out that it was the same family asking for advice. A couple of weeks later, in the fall of 2005, the family asked Johnson to take her, as they could no longer put up with her vicious biting. When Possum arrived, Johnson was shocked to find a filthy cage bedded with cedar shavings and a pile of droppings in the corner that had to be at least a month's worth. "I would bite too if I had to live in filth like that," Johnson said.

Possum was brought into the shelter, removed from her dirty cage and placed in a clean pen with food and water. The next morning, Possum was allowed out to play before Johnson had to leave for work. When she was caught by Johnson

so she could be put away in her cage, she bit down hard, drawing blood. Johnson carefully removed Possum from her hand, and set her gently in her clean cage. Possum never bit her again; with clean space, food, and water, there was no need.

Although Possum is available for adoption, she has also become something of a mascot around the rescue. She is the "senior reporter" for the Lakeroad Ferret Farm newsletter, and although at about 6 years old she is beginning to go gray, she hasn't slowed down one bit. She charms everyone who comes to the shelter, and she oversees the daily routine with plenty of energy. The day at the shelter starts at 3:30 a.m., when the night group of ferrets is returned to their cages and the day group are let out for playtime. The large house that comprises the Ferret Farm is divided into large play areas where the ferrets can safely romp.

Possum waits impatiently until it is her turn to get up and join the ferrets running wild in the eight different play areas. They are rotated between the play spaces every hour that Johnson is home to keep them stimulated and entertained. By 6 a.m., the ferrets have been given their servings of Duck Soup, and Johnson has administered any necessary medications. While Possum has met many interesting families, so far no one has seen fit to pull her away from her important reporting duties.

While these ferrets may have had some very different experiences, their common thread is the loving care that they receive, often in the personal residences that function as ferret rescues.

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