

Careers For Ferrets

Check out these interesting ferret careers!

By Audrey Pavia

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Courtesy Chris Williams

This stuffed toy ferret is the mascot for Blue Ferret Communications.

Ferrets are busy little creatures, always looking for something to do and a creative way to do it. It's not surprising, then, that some ferrets have actually been put to work, helping to earn their keep or aid those in need.

Ferrets Gainfully Employed

When it comes to earning a living, ferrets have long been in the business of using their noses and tenacious personalities to get the job done.

For ferrets, the world's oldest profession is hunting. Otherwise known as ferreting, this job entails tracking down rabbits and rodents, and flushing them out of their burrows. Ferrets are good at using their keen sense of smell to locate their prey. Their long, lean bodies can easily fit inside underground burrows, and their bold temperaments give them the drive to pursue any animal they find inside.

Ferreting has been around for a long time. The ancient Romans used ferrets as far back as 6 B.C. to control rabbit populations. The practice continued for many centuries afterward in Europe.

Ferrets still have the job of hunting in parts of the United Kingdom, where rabbits are considered pests. Ferrets chase rabbits out of the hole to where human hunters await.

Another long-held career for ferrets is the job of electrician's assistant. The ferret's ability to move quickly through small spaces comes in handy when you are trying to lay wire through narrow pipes.

A ferret named Freddie in Auckland, New Zealand, received notoriety in 1948 when Time Magazine did a story on him. Freddie spent his days helping his owner's electrical firm lay wire. It worked like this: Freddie was held at one end of a pipe (sometimes as long as 130 feet), while an air compressor and a dead rabbit were held at the other end. Fishing line was attached to Freddie's collar on one end and electrical wire on the other. Freddie was set loose in the pipe, pulling wire along with him as he ran to reach the other side.

Freddie was a fast worker, and got the job done effectively, stirring up the ire of the Auckland Local of the New Zealand Electrical Workers union, which objected to a non-union worker laying wire for a living. Freddie's employers got around this by signing Freddie up as a union member—a position he was quickly granted.

Audience, Please

As anyone who lives with a ferret can attest, ferrets love to put on a show. It's no wonder they have been recruited to entertain for a living.

Ferret actors have become more popular in Hollywood over the years, evidenced by the fact that ferrets have recently played major roles in some big-time film productions.

The 1990 movie *Kindergarten Cop*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, featured an unnamed ferret that helped his undercover police officer owner snag the bad guy. Several ferret actors were used to portray the ferret in the movie.

The 2009 fantasy film *Inkheart* stars Brendon Fraser with several ferrets that all play the role of one ferret, the companion of a character named Dustfinger. The ferrets that acted in the film were all specially trained to perform various behaviors, including running up people's arms, riding on shoulders, going into bags, carrying things in their mouths and coming when called.

A big role for a ferret in a recent motion picture came in the movie *Along Came Polly*, released in 2004. A ferret named Rodolfo co-stars in the film with Jennifer Aniston and Ben Stiller. Rodolfo is the scraggly, near-sighted pet of Aniston's

character, Polly, and manages to elicit laughs as he creates general havoc for Stiller's character, Reuben.

No discussion of ferret films would be complete without mention of the Beastmaster series, which began with a 1982 fantasy film with plenty of screen time for ferrets. The second sequel, *Beastmaster II*, also showcases the acting skills of several ferrets.

[The 2009 Disney direct-to-DVD movie *Space Buddies* features a ferret named Gravity that plays a key role in the plot. – Eds.]

Besides acting, ferrets do a good job of showing off as official mascots. The Colonial Navy of Massachusetts, for example, has a ferret as its ship mascot. Ferrets were long-used for rodent control on ships during the 18th and 19th centuries, and their hard work as ratters was appreciated. They were quieter and hunted better than dogs, and could get into smaller spaces than cats. It was a rare rodent that could evade the jaws of the ferret. Ship crews felt privileged to have ferrets on board, and the Colonial Navy of Massachusetts, a naval militia that was first established in 1775 during the Revolutionary War, adopted a ferret named Pokey as its mascot in the 1980s. Although Pokey has passed on, Bill Silveira, CNM clerk, still considers Pokey the mascot.

Ferret mascots are also helpful to businesses, such as Blue Ferret Communications in Pleasanton, California, owned by copywriter Chris Williams. The Blue Ferret Communications mascot, Boo, accompanies Williams on business engagements. Because ferret ownership is illegal in California, Boo is not a real ferret, but a stuffed toy ferret. Nonetheless, his presence attracts plenty of attention for Williams when he's looking for new customers.

"Just about everyone has the same reaction to Boo when I bring him out," Williams said. "They walk up and ask what he is, or what he's there for. I tell them he's my mascot, and it's his job to attract attention so I can tell them about my business. It works extremely well."

Ferrets Helping Others

While ferrets are adept at bringing home the bacon, they also have a talent for doing good deeds. They are used in a variety of manners meant to help those who are less fortunate.

Although pet therapist is usually a job held by dogs, some ferrets are employed as four-footed counselors. Nanette Thurber, with Fox Valley Ferret Rescue in Ellington, Wisconsin, has had a number of ferrets in her care that have taken on this important task.

Thurber has taken her ferrets to an adult daycare facility near her home to meet the patients.

"While some people have been reluctant to handle the ferrets, most are curious about them and are happy to pet or hold a ferret," Thurber said. "A woman at one session gleefully announced 'My grandchildren will never believe I held a ferret!' Luckily, I had my camera and provided proof."

People suffering from poor health are not the only ones who can benefit from the comforts of spending time with a ferret. In Japan, a number of companies are renting ferrets and other pets by the hour to hard-working people who don't have the time to keep a pet of their own. In crowded cities like Tokyo, where many residents crave a connection to nature, these rent-a-ferrets meet an important need.

Ferrets can do many types of jobs, from hunting to pet therapy and much in between. With all their many talents, it's no wonder ferrets have such a high rate of employment in the animal kingdom.

Audrey Pavia is a freelance writer who specializes in animal topics. She is the author of the book *Careers With Animals*.