

So You Want a New Ferret...

By Faith Hood

So you've made the decision to add a ferret to your household. Good for you! But before you plunk down that credit card for a cuddly baby ball of fur at the local mall pet store, wait just a minute. Have you considered adopting from a shelter? There are many rescues throughout the United States and Canada bursting at the seams with ferrets. Late spring/early summer kicks off a very busy time in the rescue world. Many people decide to surrender their animals then, and others are too busy enjoying their summer to think about adopting. But what should you expect? Read on, and I'll attempt to help in this area.

The first thing you need to understand is that ferret rescues and shelters are normally run by individuals (or clubs or groups of individuals), not corporations. Rescues rarely make a profit, so they aren't into it for the money. Most people wouldn't want to put forth the hours and money it takes to run a rescue if they didn't truly love the animals. Although there is no standard set of criteria for adoptive families, each rescue has a common goal: place the animal properly the first time to avoid repeat rescues. Their careful screening of people looking to adopt may make the shelters seem picky, but with good reason.

Your first step in adopting from a shelter is finding a rescue near you. The AFA has a wonderful listing of shelter rescues on its Web site at www.ferret.org/links/shelters.asp. Some rescues have e-mail addresses so that you can contact them that way. The majority of the rescues do not ship their ferrets, so you must find one within a reasonable driving distance. Shelters like to stay in contact

with their new extended families and like to be there in case of questions or problems down the road. Many also have in their adoption contract that, if you must give up the ferret you've adopted, then it needs to be returned to the shelter.

After you have contacted a shelter with your request, be prepared for some questions in return. Some shelters have applications right on their Web site, along with a list of ferrets looking for homes and other useful ferret information. Shelters are busy, so they like to "weed out" those they find unacceptable (for whatever reason) early on in the process. Keep in mind that shelters are not being nosy with their questions; they do have a reason behind them. Types of questions you can expect to be asked include the following:

- **Have you ever owned or do you currently own a ferret?** They are looking for recent ferret experience; so much has changed with ferrets in the past 20 years.
- **What happened to your ferret(s)?** They want to see if you can make a lifetime commitment and if you will give medical care to the ferret(s); if you still have ferrets, the shelter will want to make sure they match you with one that likes others.
- **Are there other pets in the household?** Some animals—such as aggressive dogs and birds—just aren't good mixes with ferrets; also, they don't want you to be overloaded.
- **What happened to the other pets?** (Same reasoning as before.)
- **Where do you live? Do you own or rent?** Many rentals don't accept ferrets.

- **Are there children in the household?** Having a baby is one of the top reasons for surrendered ferrets; children too young might be a problem if not supervised well enough; children not taking care of the ferret is also a top reason ferrets are given up.

- **What is your income?** This is for vet care; sometimes people don't think down the road.

- **Have you tested your ferret for Aleutian disease virus (ADV)?** You certainly don't want it to spread to the new ferret.

Other questions may include: Do you drive? Do you have a vet? Do you know that ferrets require a high nutrition (expensive) food, not grocery store-type foods? Do you have time to play with the ferret? Do you have allergies? Do you own a cage? How big is the cage?

Shelters will try and determine if you are ferret-knowledgeable. They don't want people to adopt a ferret on impulse. They want to make sure you know what you are in for, as ferrets aren't a pet for everyone. But don't worry; most shelters are more than happy to work with you before adoptions to educate you on the ownership and maintenance of ferrets. They will give you the dirty lowdowns as well as the positive parts. One thing they want is a match to last—one that is fun-filled for both the ferret and human alike.

Now with all this grilling, you are probably wondering, Should I ask what's on my mind? By all means, please do! There are many things that you, as a potential adoptive ferret

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LIVING WITH FERRETS

*Living With Ferrets:
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owner, should wonder about. Things I'd ask would be the following:

- Where are you located?
- What are your hours?
- Are your ferrets spayed and neutered?
- Are they descented? (if that is a concern of yours)
- Are they up-to-date on their vaccines?
- Have they been ADV tested? Can I get a copy of the paperwork?
- Do you do home visits before the adoption?
- Are you a no-kill rescue?
- What does your adoption process entail?
- What are your prices?

Always feel free to ask the person at the shelter whatever you want. You should also make a visit to their site. This is a good way to feel them out and see if you'd like to do business with them. You can also see how the ferrets look. Do they look well-maintained physically? How about their cage—is it clean? Do the ferrets seem happy? Look at the ferrets overall, not

just one that might have a social problem. Are the shelter owners courteous? Are they avoiding your questions or do you feel they are being truthful?

Read their contract—do you find it acceptable and reasonable? Go with your gut. You should feel welcome there, especially if you have set up the appointment in advance.

That brings me to another point: please, if you set up an appointment, be on time. It's not easy to give the proper attention to someone visiting when they are late and you have another appointment coming up. Yes, shelter personnel might get rude or quick in those situations. Shelter people are extremely busy and their time is very precious. They don't get paid to do what they do. They have many phone calls to make (or answer), errands to run (vets/food/educational opportunities), cages to clean, and boxes to scoop. So if you are going to be late, call first and ask if you should reschedule. If the shelter runs during a set time frame, get there



before they close. Coming five minutes before closing time extends the shelter personnel's day and puts them behind in their other work.

While at the shelter, you should be able to interact with some of the ferrets. If you want to be shown how to cut nails, clean ears, give baths, and perform other ferret maintenance, ask and I'm sure they will show you. If you have concerns, now is the time to bring them up. The shelter will be doing the same. Their main goal is properly caring for and placing those ferrets. They want to keep them safe and happy until they can find a suitable home for them. It's a bit like being a matchmaker: They want to find the perfect home for each ferret, and they want the perfect ferret for each home.

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