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Paw Print - Issue #4 – March 2010

Adoption – Not Just for Cats, Dogs, or Ferrets

In late December, an enormous rescue of animals took place in Arlington, Texas. A dealer of “exotic” and other animals for the pet trade was raided and shut down by the federal authorities. Over 26,000 (!) animals, kept in horrible conditions, were seized. There were, we are happy to report, only 21 ferrets and they were transferred to a [local ferret shelter](#). FACT was able to assist by paying for their rabies vaccinations. There were thousands of reptiles, some endangered species, and other small animals such as hedgehogs and hamsters.

The [SPCA of Texas](#) spent a fortune caring for the survivors. Other groups stepped forward to help move and place animals. Several zoos were able to accommodate some of the exotic animals, arachnids, and reptiles.

This situation is just a reminder that there are always animals of every species in need of homes. People often are surprised to find a ferret shelter exists. But there are dedicated shelters for specific species all across the US. Your area humane society may also have many different types of animals. We urge anyone who might be considering obtaining a pet - or even a farmyard addition - to please adopt your new friend.

Everyone receiving this newsletter is online. Sites like [Petfinder](#) or [Adopt a Pet](#) are great starts, but you can also find amazing small shelters by simply doing a Google search on shelters and your state. Save a life this spring and adopt!

L. Vanessa Gruden

Shelter Director

Paw Print is the [Ferret Association of Connecticut's](#) online newsletter. You are receiving this message because you contacted us for information. If you do



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Events - The Ferret Frolic

FACT's annual fun fest for ferrets and owners will take place on Saturday, April 17 at the Grange Hall in Wallingford, Connecticut. Hours will be 11 am to 4 pm.

Featured are contests such as Tube Races and plastic Bowling Pin Knockdowns. Trained judges will evaluate animals in Specialty Rings, where participants are judged primarily on their pets' grooming and temperament. Vendors include ferret artwork by wildlife artist Clara Rodriguez. Tamara von Ouhl will offer dental scaling and ear cleaning/nail clipping. Sally Gosselin of Kindred Spirit Animal Massage will provide massage sessions for ferrets. And FACT will be selling our popular beds, blankets, and an array of gifts for ferrets and owners. The popular Silent Auction of goods will have special and unique gifts for all pet lovers.

Owners are asked to bring a secure pet taxi and harness/leash for their

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Featured Article: Hairballs: The Hidden Killer

“Hairballs? Kill my ferret?” you might scoff. “I’ve never even seen my ferret cough up a hairball.” And that’s EXACTLY why they can kill. Ferrets rarely throw up fur they’ve ingested but that doesn’t mean it isn’t slowly collecting inside.

Spring is here and it is time for ferrets to shed their winter fur. Some ferrets “blow” their coat: pick them up and you’re covered with fur or fur comes out in clumps. They may have only their short, soft undercoat for a couple weeks until the new fur grows in. Other ferrets will shed unobtrusively. A few hairs here and there and one day you realize they’ve turned a different color.

Whether your pet’s hair seems to explode off or slowly falls out, however, that hair has to go somewhere. And a lot will end up inside their stomach as they groom themselves or each other.

Signs & Symptoms

If you are fortunate, hairs will be excreted. You might see thin, ribbon-like stools. And a ferret can vomit a hairball.

More often, however, you won’t see any sign of a hairball until your ferret is older and begins to have odd, recurring eating problems. They will begin to eat less, become lethargic, and lose weight. They may vomit watery material. Then in a few days the ferret will eat & act normally until the cycle starts again.

What may be happening is that a hairball inside their stomach is moving around. When at the entrance to the intestine, it blocks the flow of food and the ferret won’t eat. If the hairball moves aside, he or she will begin eating again.

I couldn’t find the exact quote, but Dr. Bruce Williams, the pathologist involved in investigating many ferret illnesses, once mentioned he found a great many large hairballs when he performed necropsies on dead

pets. Participating animals should be current on both canine distemper and rabies vaccinations. Food/beverages will be available onsite.

Admission: Adults: \$5 for adults, \$1 for children under 12.

Entry fees per ferret, per entry:

Fun Games: \$1. Specialty Rings: \$6.

Dental scaling: \$25. Ear cleaning/nail clipping: \$10. Ear mite exam: \$5. Pet massages: \$10 for a 10-minute session.

The Wallingford Grange is located at 586 Center Street, Wallingford, CT 06492. For directions: <http://www.mapquest.com>.



Featured Ferret Treasures Sale

hairballs when he performed necropsies on dead animals.

The bad part of a hairball is that, because it is made of a natural material, it cannot be seen on an x-ray like a piece of rubber or plastic toy can. Many veterinarians and owners will not investigate further if an x-ray looks clear. The only way to determine if a hairball is the problem is a barium radiograph. Click [here](#) for a brief explanation of the process involved for a barium study.

Since a barium series of x-rays takes longer to process, requires the ferret ingest the barium, and may need an x-ray specialist to interpret, it is more expensive than a regular x-ray.

When a ferret reaches the state where an owner decides to pursue this course of treatment, the animal may already be dehydrated, thin, and weak. Even if a hairball is discovered, a very ill animal might not survive surgery. Few owners will have a necropsy (an autopsy for animals) performed to determine cause of death. Often, the ferret dies and no one is ever really sure what happened.

Can Hairballs be Prevented?

While no one knows if you can completely eliminate hairballs, there are things you can do to lower the risk.

You can't dissolve an existing hairball. When you see a lot of hair being shed, it's smart to brush the ferret with a soft brush to remove as much as possible. Don't use the tv-advertised "rubber groomers" – it will take off all their hair with repeated use! You should also machine wash & dry their bedding frequently. Loose fur can be ingested from their blankets as well as from grooming themselves.

Hairball (also known as laxative) treatments are inexpensive. Two popular brands are Petromalt and Laxatone. A 2.5 ounce tube costs between \$5 and \$8.00. These brands use either petroleum jelly or mineral oil as a primary ingredient, then add malt syrup or other flavorings to make them taste good.

You can use plain petroleum jelly, if your ferret will eat it. One owner suggests mixing the petroleum jelly with a little Linatone or Ferratone. Mineral oil might be too

Item: Cool New Blankets

Limited edition bedding for spring! These blankets are made here at the shelter. About 28" square, with rounded edges, each is made of double-sided polar-type fleece and bound with either fleece binding or fleece "lace."

You can purchase similar blankets at pet stores, but ours are the same price, bigger, and WAY cuter! They come in several patterns: Froggie features yellow fleece with smiling green frogs, Hot Chicks are yellow baby chickens on a pink background, and Snuggle Bears are assorted, adorable teddy bears. We even have a special Peanuts™ fabric. We only have a few of each, so if your choice is already sold out we will substitute a similar style.

Fleece blankets are \$8 each. Please add \$2.50 shipping for the first blanket ordered, and \$1 for each additional blanket. To purchase, just e-mail [FerretTreasures](#). Your purchase helps the homeless ferrets cared for by the FACT shelter. Thank you!

Shaw's/Star Supermarkets

For those of you in New England who signed up for the Community Rewards program, the closing of the Connecticut Shaw's grocery stores means, of course, that the program for Connecticut residents will end. Star Markets has announced that they, too, will no longer donate to individual charities chosen by rewards cardholders. Donations for purchases to groups like FACT will still be honored up to April 30.

Featured Foster Ferret

harsh for their digestive system and it doesn't taste very good, either! Mineral oil, despite its name, is a byproduct of gasoline distillation like petroleum jelly. If you would rather not use a petroleum-based treatment, there are "petroleum-free" options available. NatureVet and Vetbasis are two, and Petco and Petsmart sell a version made by Sentry. These remedies use soybean and cod liver oil as their main ingredients.

You do not need specific "ferret" laxatives. The ingredients are basically the same as cat products. Read the ingredient list; it's more important to find one your ferret will eat. Most ferrets like malt-flavorings but some will also eat tuna or fish flavors.

Another "natural" option is to occasionally feed your ferret a vegetable such as pumpkin or squash that has a lot of fiber. The easiest way is to give them a spoonful of pumpkin, either canned or baby food formula. If they won't accept it plain, you can mix with a treat of Duck Soup or [Gruel](#). Don't use pumpkin pie filling; it's full of sugar.

When Should You Give Hairball Treatments?

Spring and fall are the main shed periods for ferrets, so every ferret should have hairball remedies then. Just squeeze about 1" of the gel or ointment on a plate once or twice a week and let your ferret lick it up.

We keep our ferrets indoors, so many are "out of sync" with nature and will shed their coats at other times. Some veterinarians recommend you give hairball preventative throughout the year and more often in spring and fall. Petroleum jelly and mineral oil can affect the ability of the stomach and intestines to absorb nutrients from food, so if you plan to give hairball remedies year-round you may want to use a "natural" one that is not made with petroleum products.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." In the case of hairballs, might be worth your pet's life, too. The few dollars and few minutes you spend preventing hairballs are certainly worth the investment for your ferret's health and long life.

Carmine came to us at 5 years old. His owner lost her job and had to move in with people who wouldn't accept him. Carmine does NOT believe he is a ferret, he believes he is a human and although he was VERY insulted by having to live with animals at first, after several months in a permanent Foster home, Carmine has begun to play and sleep with another Foster, Shasta. Carmine was recently diagnosed with insulinoma, but is being treated with medication.

To learn how you can sponsor Carmine, Shasta, or one of the other 30-40 ferrets in FACT's Foster Program, or make a one-time donation, visit our site: [Make a Donation](#).



FACT is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and donations are deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Paw Print is published by the [Ferret Association of Connecticut, Inc.](#), a nonprofit humane organization dedicated to helping ferret owners, caretakers, and most importantly, the ferrets themselves. Website: www.ferret-fact.org.

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