

Preparing For Emergencies - Create a Notebook With Ferret Information

Excerpted from "Creating a Safety Net," by Mary K. Van Dahm in the F.A.I.R. Report, July/August, 2000

If you have several ferrets, it really helps to keep a notebook with information about your ferrets. In this notebook, list your ferrets' names – one name per page. Under his or her names, write a detailed description of each ferret. Is the ferret male or female? List month and year born, not just "current" age, since 6 months from now that age will no longer be current, but a birth date never changes. What color is the ferret? Does it have any special markings, such as spots, white feet or toes, or a stripe on the head? If there is a stripe, is it wide or narrow? Is the nose pink, black, or spotted? Does your ferret have a mask? If there is a mask, is the mask wide, narrow, faint, or bold? Does the ferret have long hair or short? Is the coat full or is the ferret balding? (Take into consideration seasonal shedding and coat changes.) Are there any kinks in the ferret's tail or other unusual characteristics or deformities?

If possible, tape at least one picture of each ferret in the notebook. Two or more pictures are even better. One picture should be a clear shot of the ferret's face. A second shot should show the ferret's whole body. If any of your ferrets have drastic coat color changes with the seasons, it would be helpful to take pictures of these ferrets and tape them in your notebook. Note what time of the year the pictures were taken and whether the ferret had its normal coat or was in the process of shedding.

Medical History

If your ferrets are young and have been relatively healthy, you might not have much information to write down, but you should at least note what vaccines your ferrets have had and when your ferrets are due for their shots again. Also make a note whether your ferrets have ever reacted to any vaccines or other medications. Somewhere in the notebook, preferably inside the front cover, you should list who your veterinarian is. You should also write a note of release for the veterinarian to release your records to the person taking your ferrets. Some veterinarians are very strict about releasing records, and may not be willing to bend the rules and release information, even if they know you have died. Most veterinarians will honor a note of release. It is often helpful to have a copy of this note put in your file at your veterinarian's office, too, so he [or she] is aware of your wish in advance.

Having vital medical information written in your notebook is essential. If your ferrets have any medical conditions or are on any medications, be sure to list them all. Make note of when the medications are given and how much of each medication is given. [Be sure to update this when/if it changes!] Highlight this information with a highlighter marker so it catches the eye of anyone looking through the notebook. Have your ferrets had any blood work done or x-rays? Have any of them had surgery? If so, what was the surgery for? Note when these procedures were done and what the results were.

An important note: Make sure all of your ferrets' medications are labeled and that the labels are legible. You may know what prednisone, Lasix, or other medications look like, but you can't assume that everyone else does. If your ferret is on any medication that needs refrigeration, make sure your notes specify that, also.

Cage Tags

Another method for quick identification is the use of cage tags. These are just little cards that you can tape to the cage with brief descriptions of each animal on them. List any medications and dosages the ferrets might be on. This will at least catch someone's attention in case they don't notice your notebook right away. You can also make a note on the card referring to the notebook so someone will know to look for it.

Compatibility

On each page make a list of all the other ferrets that each ferret gets along with. Do any of your ferrets have a "best friend" or special buddy that you feel strongly about keeping together or can the ferret be paired with anyone on the list? Is this ferret related to any others? Does the ferret get along with other ferrets or other pets at all? You may have a multiple ferret family, but let them out in shifts because they don't get along together. How would someone else know that if you didn't write it down somewhere? Also note whether your ferrets get along with kids or not. Do your ferrets nip or bite?

Preferences

There are many other things that you should list that may or may not be critical. What type of food does your

ferret usually eat? Are there any special treats that he likes? Does he have any food allergies? Does your ferret use a water bottle or bowl? What kind of bedding does he like? Is your ferret a hammock lover or does he prefer to sleep in a sack or bed on the floor of the cage? Is he prone to chewing on any types of bedding, such as t-shirts or other soft materials? Does your ferret have a litter preference? Are there certain litters that he won't use at all or that he might be more prone to dig out of the litter pan? It might be a good idea to put a cautionary note to let the person taking your ferrets know that he shouldn't use clumping litter or cedar shavings because these litters may cause health problems.

Does your ferret have any favorite toys? Are these toys already in his cage or are they scattered around the house somewhere?

Habits

Are there any little quirky things that your ferret does that others should know about? Is he a heavy sleeper? Does he snore? Does he chuckle or hiss a lot? Is he normally active at certain times of the day? Does he like to hide things? Does he scratch at carpeting? Providing this kind of information will let the new owner know if your ferret is acting like his normal self or if he might be depressed or under the weather.

It never hurts to be prepared for the worst. This information is also good to have for when you go on vacation and have someone come in to care for your pets. They provide your pet sitter with all of the information he or she might need to take care of your pets while you are gone. It is also a good idea to have a friend or family member become acquainted with your ferrets. This way they will know the ferrets better and can help expedite the care and placement of your pets should something happen to you.

Finances

FACT Paw Print Editor's note: Mary also mentions that it is a good idea to put some money in an envelope inside your ferret notebook. Even if you're only on vacation and using a pet sitter, you never know if an animal might get injured or suddenly become ill and unless you make prior billing arrangements with an emergency vet clinic, the caretaker may not have the money on hand to pay for care. Unless the emergency clinic is your regular hospital, they will require payment in advance for treatment and you may not be immediately available to provide a credit card number while traveling. If you should be seriously injured or even die, \$50 or \$100 tucked away will at least allow a caretaker to purchase food for your pets until you get better or until your estate is settled. Another option might be to leave a signed letter with a credit card number and state in it that the caretaker has been given your authorization to charge certain medical bills for your animals in your absence.