

## Ferrets:

### Fuzzy escape artists Two-year-olds with fur Agents of Chaos



Ferrets are all these things and more. I think the most important thing to remember about ferret safety is that when there is a conflict between the ferret and the environment, the environment will change, not the ferret.

They are curious from the tip of their little pink noses to the end of their little fuzzy tails. Some ferrets seem to have a death wish, and it's our job to keep them safe.

What follows is a checklist to help you ferret-proof your home. It's basically the same as childproofing, except for a 2-pound, extremely flexible child!

### Ferret-proof the owner!

#### *Rule #1: Pay attention.*

Investigate that rustling noise. If it's 2 a.m. and you hear the sound of plastic bags, check it out even if you have other animals that might be the cause. Be aware of the sound a ferret makes when investigating a new room. Mine have a distinctive "rustle rustle pause, rustle pause rustle rustle" pattern. Note the sound of a ferret digging at carpet, wood, plastic, cardboard, etc. If you're hearing something a little odd, go look. If one of your fuzzies scratches at the gate all the time and one evening you hear a slight change in that scratching, go look. Mine will pause and then scratch intensely when they're making headway. Investigate that funny squeak – it could be nothing, or it could be the only noise a ferret can make with his head stuck in something. Investigate any chitters of pain, even if they all seem to be playing. One of my guys ripped off a nail and the first time I noticed it was when I was clipping nails a few days later. Talk about feeling guilty!

Be suspicious of an overturned wastepaper basket in a forbidden room. If something is out of its normal place, find out why. For example, if you find a roll of toilet paper sitting in the middle of your hallway, investigate. Maybe someone dropped it; maybe the cat knocked it down and batted it out of the bathroom; or maybe, just maybe, your naughty little silver-mitt got over the gate again and is merrily collecting souvenirs.

Count heads before running the dishwasher or other household appliances (not just tails—the heads might be stuck in something!). Count heads before going to bed or leaving the house. Look in that partially open drawer before you close it. Put the ferrets away before moving furniture (we know how much they like to help). Check before you slam a door, leave the house, open the basement door, etc. Get into the habit of counting heads periodically while they're out playing. It will alert you to an escape sooner, or perhaps even save the life of a ferret stuck between the wall and a piece of furniture.

Carefully watch where you walk and perhaps adopt the famous “ferret-owner shuffle” to avoid stepping on little toes and tails. Be sure it's really just a wrinkle in the carpet before you step on it, and don't tread on blankets or clothing left on the floor. I



I have heard more than one sad story in which owners have killed their ferret by stepping on the poor thing as they stepped over a gate or stumbled around in the dark (not expecting the ferret to be out).

Ferret proof rooms outside the play area, too. If your ferret should scale a barrier and slip into a hole in the wall, you'll be angry with yourself for not patching it earlier. It might be instructive to “accidentally” let your ferret get out of the play area just to see where they are likely to go. Of course, this isn't foolproof. Ferret ownership is definitely one of those “expect the unexpected” situations. One year, my husband took the paneling off the wall in my

front hall in order to remodel. Once the ferrets realized something was different out there, getting through that doorway became a two- or three-man operation! Trying to prevent eight ferrets from slipping through the gate with you is exceedingly difficult. And guaranteed, every single time a ferret managed to escape, he or she ran straight for the exposed framing. My little silver-mitt girl would literally dive for the space between the studs. I shudder to think where she would



have ended up (and how dirty she would have been) if she had ever managed to get inside the walls or floors! I had the chance to try out some new dive-and-tackle maneuvers made up on the fly. You stay in shape with ferrets. [This brings to mind some ferret-owner exercises: First you do the “hop on one leg oh ick I have ferret poo squished between my toes” exercise. Then you can practice the “bend over and wipe ferret poop off the shoe,” “take ferret off the table and put back on the floor,” and the ever-popular “damn it, come back here with my shoe” floor exercise.]

*Rule #2: Confine them to a very safe area or cage when you are not home.*

I put mine in their cage. I find it much easier to make a cage safe than to ferret proof a room or an entire house. People could come in, windows might be left open or a barrier could be climbed, thereby giving the ferret access to dangers you thought were safely tucked away.

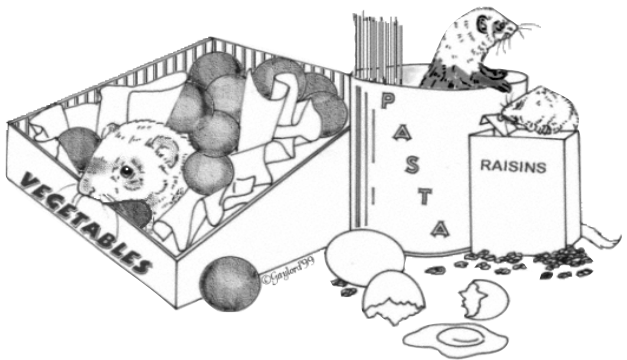
*Rule #3: Confine them to a safe area when you let them out to play.*

You will still need to supervise, (unless you enjoy the sound of your grandmother’s china crashing to the floor). One of my ferrets likes to knock all the shampoo bottles down if he gains access to the bathroom. It’s rather obvious from the loud crashing noises

that he's gotten past the gate. Again. When Pepper was in his prime, he'd methodically empty all the wastepaper cans and hide all the toilet paper. Some people put bell collars on their ferrets to help keep track of where they are. I have a rather large number of ferrets and it didn't take long for the incessant jingling to drive me crazy. I rely on the sound of havoc.

*Rule #4: No area is completely safe.*

Ferrets never seem to stop learning, especially when it involves how to do something you really wish they wouldn't. Sufficiently motivated (and most ferrets are) they will learn how to traverse seemingly impossible obstacles to get to your breakables, or discover how to scale vertical surfaces to get to forbidden areas. I have some delightful video of my female silver-mitt, Moggie, seemingly galloping in mid-air like one of Santa's reindeer. She was actually wedged between a carpeted wall and a piece of Plexiglas put up to keep her from climbing the wall. Right now the humans are winning (after a few modifications), but she studies the problem daily and I have no doubt she'll figure it out eventually.



*Rule #5: If it has a hole, your ferret will stick his head into it.*

If a ferret can get his head into it, he can most likely get the rest of him in there, too—or get stuck trying, in which case he could strangle himself. Many ferrets only need an opening one inch in diameter to escape. Many can flatten themselves and get under doors. Others will enlarge small holes or even pull electrical outlet boxes right out of the walls in the search for new adventure. Don't underestimate the power of those little front feet. When introducing your ferret to a new area, follow him around for a few days to see what he finds.

## Ferret-proof the environment

### Cage

#### *Escape possibilities:*

Make sure cage doors close securely. Spring latches wear out eventually, and the ferret may use his head as a wedge to pry open the door and squeeze through. Any place where two pieces of cage come together is a possible escape route. I've heard of several incidents where small females got out through the corner of a cage.

#### *Physical Dangers:*

Wire ramps and floors should be covered (carpet, linoleum, cloth, etc.). I hear the screaming was awful the time a large male caught his penis on the wire of the ramp.

Feet and toes can also be caught or pinched on ramps, joints, and wherever water bottles or food dishes are attached. My little Rosie recently caught her foot between the food dish and the cage wire.

Another ferret I know broke a toe in three places (and dislocated those pieces) when he caught his toe in the wire at the bottom of a

ramp. His toe actually hung down, veritably dangled, with only the skin holding it together. I know the owner felt worse than the ferret. (It is interesting to note, however, that as the toe became swollen, it pulled the toe

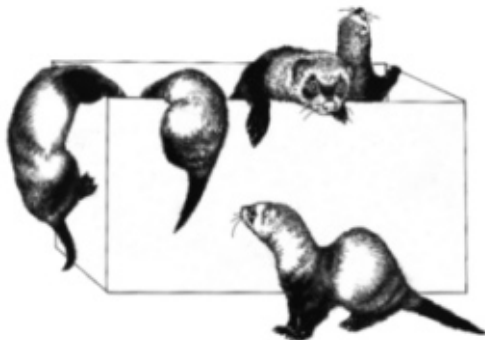


back in line with the others and it healed rather well.)

You can't remove all possible dangers, but you can at least try to minimize them. Try not to leave spaces between the cage wire and attached food dishes. Think about where the ferrets are likely to put their feet. Part of the reason why Rosie caught her foot was because I'd placed a food dish close to a climbing path. She is small, and was using the edge of the dish as a "pushing-off" point.

## All rooms

*Windows:* Screens can be torn or popped out. Ferrets, being fearless, have been known to jump from great heights, often surviving, leading their owners on a merry chase through the neighborhood. Worse, they could be injured and hole up somewhere, making it even harder to find them. If you aren't in the room, be sure to close the windows or put the ferret somewhere safe (like in the cage).



Some older houses have inside screens attached to wooden frames on hinges. You have to open the screen first to get to the window latch. One summer, my ferrets Max, Pepper and Bumper, doing a very good imitation of the Three Musketeers, figured out how to open the screen and launched themselves on a grand adventure. At least to them it was a grand adventure. I was less than thrilled. Thankfully, they decided the neighbor's grass was the perfect height for dancing, and didn't wander out onto the street. A day or so later, I heard an odd noise and caught Pepper expanding a small hole in the screen. He was all set to slip out into a whole new world of front porch delights—like Alice through a screen! We solved that problem by moving the chair farther away from the window.

If you have ferrets, make sure all your screens are metal mesh and not the softer fiberglass. The metal is harder to tear, which slows them down a little, and makes a lot more noise when scratched at. You never know when your ferret might figure out some clever way to get to a window, even those you thought he could never reach.

*Doors:* Does “faster than a speeding bullet” ring any bells? Some experts recommend gates across all outside doors, since ferrets can slip out unnoticed as someone enters or leaves the house. Any time the door is opened, if the ferrets are loose you have a potential problem. If your attention wanders even slightly, you

could learn the heartbreak of losing your fuzzy friend.

*Furnace air ducts:* These can be pathways not only to less secure rooms, but the furnace itself. Make sure the vent covers (register covers) are on securely.

*Holes:* Anything bigger than one inch is a possible escape route for a ferret. Ferrets have gotten into walls and from there into spaces above ceilings, attics, basements, other apartments, etc. I've heard of more than one case where an owner had to tear out part of a wall to free their ferret. Another frightening thing about ferrets in walls is that electric wires might not be completely covered. The ferret could also knock off a protective plastic cap while climbing, exposing bare wires.

*Electrical and telephone cords:* Some ferrets will chew on cords (Bitter Apple usually stops that) and others seem to enjoy pulling things down on themselves. One rescue ferret had an intense interest in pulling every single phone down from the wall or table. You wouldn't think a ferret weighing only a pound or two could manage to pull a heavy desk phone off a table (that had a lip on it, no less), but that was his mission in life. I used half a bottle of



Bitter Apple before he finally decided to find a new mission! I've also heard of some rather expensive damage done to computers in this way.

*Buttons & rubber feet:* A ferret may try to bite

the tops off telephone and TV remote buttons, as well as attack anything with rubber feet. Electronic equipment often has small rubber or cork feet on the bottom, the perfect size to swallow and cause blockages. Kitchen countertop equipment sometimes has feet like that, too. When things get older, sometimes the feet come off and stick to the tabletop or drop to the floor unnoticed. Don't forget to keep an eye on any rubber ends on table or chair legs as well as portable fans, vaporizers, dehumidifiers, humidi-



fiers, etc.

*Loose or missing outlet covers:* This allows access to electrical dangers as well as the chance to escape into the wall. If an outlet cover is loose, guaranteed your ferret will spot it. Many ferrets would view this as an opportunity to demonstrate just how clever they are by clawing at it until it was pulled out of the wall.



*Space heaters:* Whether a flame, heating element or radiator-style, if it's too hot for you to touch, it's too hot for your ferret to be near. Some have pilot lights that are on all the time and I've witnessed my own ferrets crawling up inside the darned thing!

### **Room-specific**

#### **Living room**

*Escape possibilities:*

*Chimney:* I once saw a video of a ferret climbing a brick fireplace on the outside. I'm sure the inside would be just as much fun and could conceivably lead to the roof. Worse, they could be overcome by carbon monoxide fumes.

#### **Physical dangers:**

*Chairs & couches:* Living rooms are a traditional place to find overstuffed chairs, recliners, sofa beds, etc. Ferrets love the "inside" of anything, and many will climb down into couches and chairs. They will dig at, and perhaps eat, pieces of foam (and foam can cause blockages). They could also get caught in or be crushed by the springs. Many ferrets have been killed or injured by recliner and sofa bed mechanisms. I finally got rid of my couch and bought a futon. Not only were my ferrets digging in my couch and using it for storage, but some had an annoying tendency to nip at your bottom when they had the opportunity!

*Miscellaneous:* Venetian blind cords: they could strangle themselves playing with them or chew on them and swallow pieces. Rocking chairs: a danger to little toes and tails. Fireplace equip-



ment: heavy tools or covers could fall on them, or glass covers could be knocked over and broken. Open flames such as candles, fireplaces, and space heaters: ferrets seem to have a higher curiosity drive than survival instinct, and they don't seem to mind the scent of burning hair and whiskers. Bookcases & shelves: these offer the opportunity to knock breakables down and jump onto the shards, the chance to gain access to forbidden areas, and the possibility of falls.

## Dining room

*Physical dangers:*

*Decorations:* Table centerpieces would be fun for a ferret to root through. Some may have plastic pieces that could be chewed and swallowed or perhaps dyes that would be harmful.

## Kitchen

*Escape possibilities:*

*Cabinets:* The kick plate of cabinets (where your toes go when you stand at the sink) often has an opening at the top allowing access to under the sink, and perhaps to holes in the wall where pipes or gas lines come in. Some cabinets might have holes of their own or other structural oddities that would allow the ferret to crawl underneath or along the wall to gain access to other areas. A ferret inside the cabinets will often discover that silverware drawers make wonderful stepping-stones to the countertop. On there, they could have access to things they might otherwise not be able to reach, like the exhaust fan vent, windows, garbage disposal, etc.



*Garbage can:* You've heard the saying "don't throw the baby out with the bath water"? Well, be sure you're not throwing your ferret out with the garbage. You might not think it's a good place for a nap, but a ferret might.

*Physical dangers:*

*Oven:* Be careful when you open the door. Several of my ferrets

have hopped right up on the oven door to peer inside (luckily, the oven was cold at the time, but it horrified me to think of the possibilities). Many ovens have a space under them large enough for a ferret. Mine used to get into the pot drawer until I realized they were ripping the fiberglass insulation off from around the oven! Not only is there a danger of them getting glass fibers in their eyes, mouth and skin, but of your accidentally leaving some of the fibers in the pots when you cook!

*Under sink:* Many people keep household cleaners (ferrets are attracted to Lysol and will drink it), dishwasher detergent, oven cleaner and other dangerous chemicals under their sink. Be sure your ferret can't get into that area via the kick plate (see above) or by prying the doors open with their nails. Other things found under the sink that might pose a danger would be pot scrubbers and sponges. Ferrets have even been known to chew on steel wool. Any of these things could cause blockages.

*Refrigerator or freezer:* My Moggie nearly froze to death when she was a kit. I have a bottom-opening freezer and she slipped inside when a friend opened the door. She was in there for 45 minutes before we found her, very cold but otherwise unharmed. I shuddered for days over that one, thinking of what might have happened. Ferrets can suffocate in the refrigerator just like small children, but most likely would suffer from hypothermia before that. Ferrets like to store treasures and take naps behind the fridge, which exposes them to electricity, gas lines, insulation and moving parts.

*Dishwasher:* Always check inside before you run it, even if they couldn't possibly be in there. It might be a little neurotic, but I'd rather check unnecessarily than to find out too late that someone else in the family hadn't been as careful as I was. My ferrets consider water found on the door of the dishwasher vastly superior to any water I might offer them in a bowl. If your ferret is the same, watch that there



is no detergent residue for them to lick up. Mine also will lick the dirty dishes—they won't eat the food if you offer it to them, but they'll fight each other to steal a lick from a 2-day-old plate! I worry about food poisoning, so no ferrets are allowed in the dishwasher when it's dirty. Don't leave the door open if you're not in the room even if it's clean and empty. They could catch a toe in something (like the metal wash arm) and hurt themselves badly before you could get there to help. In general, you're just better off keeping them out of major appliances altogether.

*Trash compactor:* We know how ferrets love to climb into things, and this appliance would obviously be deadly if the cycle were engaged while a ferret was in there.



*Miscellaneous:* Believe it or not, there have been cases of ferrets nearly suffocating themselves by getting their head stuck in an empty paper towel roll. Many ferret owners cut them lengthwise or tear them along the seam to avoid any chance of this happening.

## **Bathroom**

*Escape possibilities:*

As in kitchens, any place water pipes go into the wall is a possible exit route. Closets should be checked for holes. There also might be ways a ferret could get to a window or into the ceiling by climbing various fixtures, furniture or shelves.

*Physical dangers:*

*Toilet:* I haven't actually heard of a ferret drowning in the toilet, but there is always that possibility. Bowl cleaning chemicals left in the tank are often caustic and therefore dangerous. Don't let them drink the blue water!



*Chemicals:* The bathroom is another place people often store cleaning supplies, so be as diligent here as you are in the kitchen. Under the sink is a common location, and bathroom vanities may have the same kick-plate problem as kitchen cabinets do.

*Medications:* Childproof certainly isn't ferret proof. Most children don't have jaws designed to shear a bone! Medicine cabinets are usually accessible from the sink top and you might be surprised by how easily ferrets manage to get up there. All it took for Pepper to get onto my sink top was for my daughter to leave her jeans in a pile just outside the clothes hamper. That was enough of a boost for him to get to the top of the hamper, onto the vanity top and over to the last remaining plant on my second floor.

*Miscellaneous:* Like paper towel rolls, toilet paper rolls can also trap ferrets' heads. I automatically tear them along the seam as I toss them into the trash. Theoretically, none of my ferrets should be able to get to the bathroom anymore, much less to the bathroom trash, but you never know when something might change. Ferrets often like eating soap, too, so keep that in mind.

## **Bedroom**

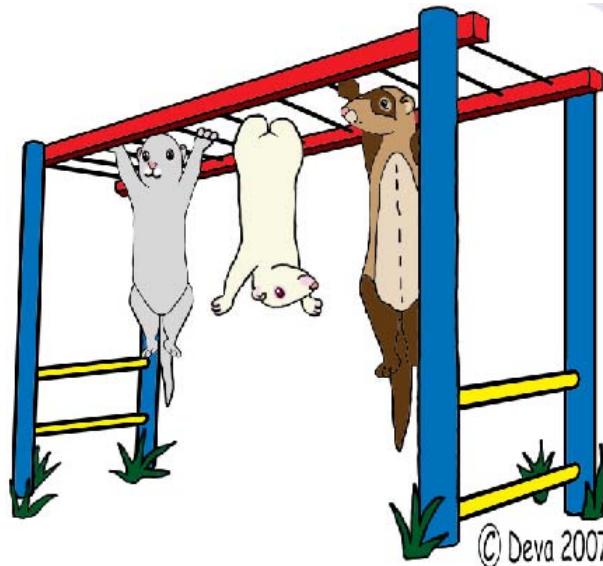
*Escape possibilities:* Same as for other rooms, with the possible addition of trunks or bags to climb into which might cause them to be carried out of the house. Imagine Aunt Mildred's surprise when she unpacks!

*Physical dangers:*

*Box springs & mattresses:* Ferrets often get inside and could get

caught in between the springs (deadly if someone plops down on the bed). They also enjoy digging into the batting or foam and might swallow some, causing the infamous blockage. Some people have been successful at keeping their ferrets out of their beds by using one of those vinyl zippered bags sold for allergy sufferers. Others have found the only solution was to keep the door shut.

*Nightstand:* You might not think Nyquil tastes all that good, but



your ferret probably would, so you shouldn't keep medications anywhere your ferrets could get to them. Foil packets that full-grown humans can't get into are no problem for a ferret's sharp teeth, and many ferrets are attracted to the sharp crinkling noises these things make. Pull-apart capsules are made from a shiny,

clear substance that looks a lot like a ferret's favorite toy: plastic. Also, many pills are coated with a sweet-tasting shell, which may very well attract a ferret.

*Drawers:* Both nightstands and regular dressers have drawers that are often accessible from behind. Some dressers have a space underneath and no solid bottom, giving a ferret access to new worlds. This isn't so bad if all they can get into is your frilly lingerie or sock drawer, but there might be dangerous or embarrassing things in there you thought were safely put away. Medicines, perfumes, latex or rubber birth control devices are all things likely to be found in a bedroom drawer. Aunt Minnie doesn't need to see your ferret dragging tampons, birth controls pills or your leather bra through the living room when she visits. And guaranteed your

ferret will choose that day to show you his new trick!

## **Laundry room — basement — garage — attic**

### *Escape possibilities:*

*Access holes:* Workmen often don't take great care in patches holes made in the foundation for pipes or wires to come in. Also, there may be access to crawl spaces, inside walls, above ceilings, or any number of places you'd really rather your ferret not go.

*Vents:* Sometimes dryer vents are made from a flexible plastic ferrets can tear easily, allowing them access to inside the dryer (where you could not possibly expect him to be) or the outside. Any vent (dryer, hot water heater, furnace, etc.) to the outside is a possible avenue for escape. Determined ferrets can even get inside metal vents if they pull it away from the appliance and slip inside.

*Doors:* Sometimes doors in the basement have a larger space underneath than usual, which would allow a ferret access to the garage or outdoors.

### *Physical dangers:*

*Washer & dryer:* Ferrets have been known to fall asleep on clothing in a laundry basket, inside the dryer, or even, as in one reported case, inside the washer! These appliances often are higher off the floor than stoves and refrigerators, which would allow a ferret access to a pilot light or full flame, electrical wiring, or mechanical moving parts. As well as the danger of escape, access to a vent might cause a ferret to be overcome by carbon monoxide fumes (or even poison its whole family by chewing a hole in the hose).

*Furnace:* Aside from the same mechanical and electrical hazards as a washer and dryer, furnaces have fiberglass filters a ferret





might chew on or dig at, as well as ductwork going everywhere in the house. A ferret getting into a cold air return in the living room could follow it down to the furnace and back up again to just about any place in the house. This is especially a problem for apartments that share the same furnace. You don't want your ferret turning up in someone's bedroom late one night!

*Miscellaneous:* Basements often have unfinished walls, allowing an enterprising ferret access to walls and floors. These walls often have wiring that might not have been covered very well (since most homeowners aren't small enough to crawl through the walls). Also, in the average basement, you often find various power tools, gardening supplies, chemicals, paints and even poisons. Ferrets love to knock things off shelves and so might expose themselves to dangerous chemicals or even accidentally mix something together that might cause poisonous fumes. Between the danger of pulling something heavy down on themselves, cutting themselves on sharp tools or playing mad doctor with chemicals, I'd strongly advise you to take care to keep your ferret out of your basement and/or garage.



It's not beyond the realm of possibility for a ferret to climb inside a grass catcher on a lawn mower, either.

## Closets

### *Escape possibilities:*

Holes into walls or other rooms, falling asleep in a knapsack or other bag (and being carried outside), getting into the lining of coats, or climbing inside bags of old clothes to be given away (we know you don't want to give your ferret away or give Goodwill workers the surprise of their lives).



*Physical dangers:*

*Chemicals:* Closets often contain mothballs, air fresheners or dehumidifying substances that you might even have forgotten about. Even bug killers or mouse poison might have been placed in a closet that you didn't even know about.

*Miscellaneous:* Foam padding or insulation can be found on cold weather wear, and ferrets have been known to dig inside shoes and boots. A ferret might also chew on rubber from over-shoes, boots or gloves or gain access to games with small pieces that could be chewed and swallowed.



### **Library — Den — Computer Room**

*Escape possibilities:*

*Inside things:* Ferrets love boxes and will often take a nap in them, which could then be carried outside to the trash. Ferrets could even climb inside computers and be carried outside or shocked. My smallest female was found sleeping inside a computer on the motherboard once—she'd slipped in through the slot where a disk drive was supposed to be. Never underestimate the power of "inside."

*Physical dangers:*

*Technology:* Computers, phones, desk lights, etc. all present an opportunity to a ferret. Computer wires are particularly vulnerable, and while it probably won't hurt your ferret to chew on the mouse wire (unless it swallows some of the wire), it doesn't do much good for your equipment.

*Desk drawers:* A ferret could get caught partway in, be trapped inside by someone shutting the drawer, or have access to supplies normally off limits. Erasers are a particular blockage danger and ferrets seem to like to chew on them.

*Things found anywhere:*

*Window fans:* The ferret could push it out of the way and escape, pull it down on themselves, or chew on rubber feet.

*Floor fans:* Often have rubber feet, wires that dangle enticingly or perhaps a cover that would allow little feet access to the fan blades.

*Baby supplies* like swings (a ferret could get caught in the mechanism), teething rings, pacifiers, and nipples (babies don't generally come equipped with sharp canines, so these things are not all that tough), toys that could be chewed, disposable diapers (made of materials designed to soak up fluid; a very bad thing for a ferret to swallow), good-tasting medications, and eye droppers (I have a ferret whose goal in life is to put as many holes as possible in any given eye dropper). Don't discount the babies themselves—small children can be very rough and could injure the ferret, which might very well move a ferret to defend itself. Don't ever leave small children and any animal alone in a room.

*Noise abatement supplies* from work like foam earplugs (I don't keep them in my house at all—they're a common cause of blockages).



*Swimming supplies:* bathing caps (rubbery and great for blockages), goggles (rubber straps), foam or wax earplugs (see paragraph above), pool chemicals and test equipment, sun block and other tan-related potions (our ferrets seem to think the oddest things taste wonderful—mine will drink baby oil as

if it was Ferretone).

*Furniture:* Ferrets sometimes get caught between walls and furniture. Everything should either be too close to get behind, or have enough room that they can't get stuck. Think about couches,

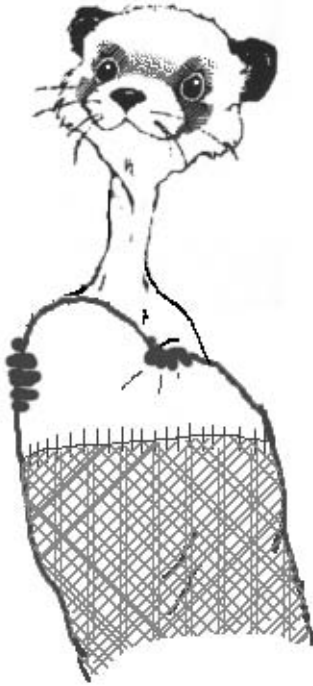
chairs and other furniture that might be accessed from the top. I heard of one ferret rescued in the nick of time after he'd fallen behind a piece of furniture and became wedged between the leg



of the couch and the baseboard. Be especially cautious with furniture that is farther away from the wall at the top than it is at the bottom. Also, don't expect a nasty scare to be much of a deterrent. My Bumper nearly strangled himself one evening between the wall and a record cabinet. As soon as he was released, he put his head in there again!! I'm sure ferret owners everywhere are familiar with that "beating your head against the wall" feeling.

Loose rugs, blankets or clothing on the floor can cause a tragedy if a visitor steps on a ferret hidden under something like this. Either pick it all up before company comes or put the ferrets away when you have visitors. Make it a personal rule never to step on anything that could conceivably hide a ferret. Look at the back of carpets or rugs—can your ferret chew on any sort of padding or backing? If you can see it, they can eat it; and they will.

Plants not only can be destroyed (in three seconds flat) but could cause poisoning or blockages if chewed on. After browsing through a veterinary poisonous plants database, it turns out that Poinsettia plants are only mildly poisonous compared to many other common house and garden plants. Put all plants where ferrets can't



get to them, and consider getting rid of any that are poisonous (a quick check with your vet or an online database would help). Years ago, before I knew any better, my Pepper nearly brained himself (almost destroying a LaserJet printer in the process) by tugging on a cloth I had under a plant on a high shelf. He pulled the plant down (which landed upside-down on the floor) and it barely missed my new printer. Pepper had a good time, though, digging out what was left of the plant. He left darling little ferret footprints on my futon. I have pictures!

Anything plastic, rubber, leather or vinyl can present a problem to ferrets who chew on them. Some ferrets are perfectly safe playing with plastic grocery store bags, but I've heard of others who got blockages from such things. Keep an eye on these things; if your ferret chews on them, remove them.

*Soap:* some ferrets like the taste of soap, so watch their access to it. Soap makes people vomit and have diarrhea; it would do the same for a ferret. The perfumes wouldn't be very good for them, either.

*Styrofoam pellets and packaging inserts:* Ferrets love to chew on Styrofoam packing and play in the pellets. If they swallow any, it could easily compact and cause a blockage.

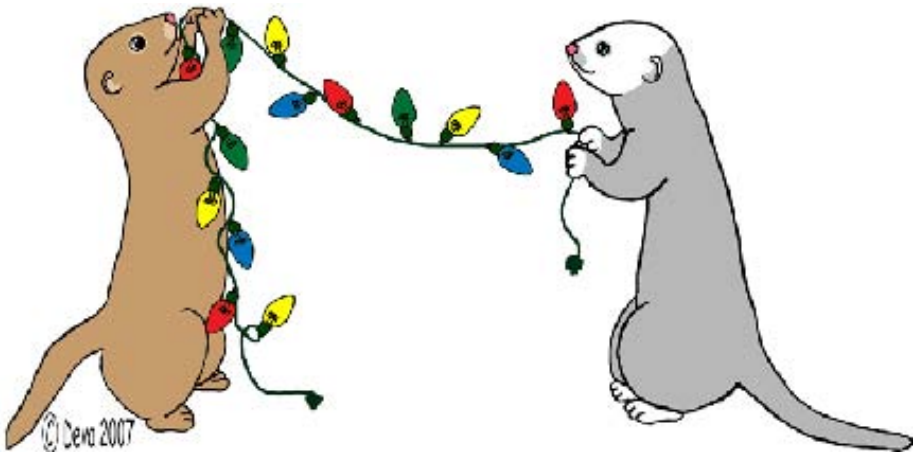
*Cupboards:* Sometimes the only way to keep a ferret out of your cupboards is to use a childproof lock. The best, in my opinion, are the newer magnetic ones that don't change the outside appearance of the door at all. I've seen them in hardware and home improvement stores, as well as online at The Ferret Store ([www.ferretstore.com](http://www.ferretstore.com)).

theferretstore.com).

*Unlikely problems:* I've already mentioned various computer-related dangers, but sometimes a ferret will do something so off-the-wall, it's hard to believe. A friend of mine found her ferret, Ginger, with her little head deep inside the inkjet printer, happily licking away at the color ink cartridge! I'm sorry she didn't take pictures ... she told me Ginger's nose was blue (it was usually pink) and her teeth were bright yellow! The guy from the Hewlett-Packard help line thought it was rather amusing. He said his wife had asked for a ferret, but now he wasn't so sure he should get her one!

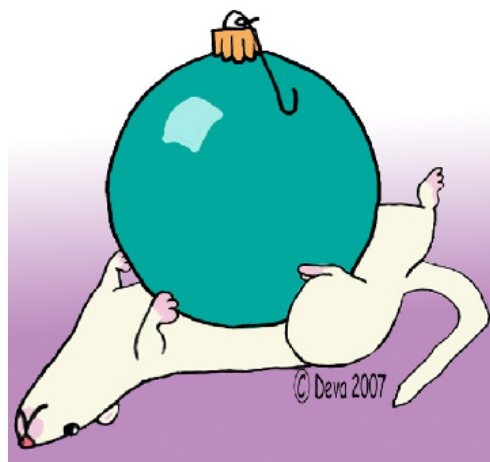
### Special holiday concerns

*Christmas Trees:* Don't let your ferrets drink the water for the tree, especially if you put a preservative in it. Be careful of the ornaments—besides the obvious danger of being cut by breakable ornaments, I've found satin-wrapped decorations have a Styro-



foam ball at the center. I had some little red apple ornaments that also turned out to have foam-like interiors. Put the breakable ones up high and if you really don't want the area under your couch filled with Christmas cheer, tie the bottom ornaments on securely with ribbon or yarn. I'd recommend you skip the icicles altogether. Swallowing them can injure a number of pets as they can get tangled around their stomach and intestines. Bright and flashing lights attract ferrets, so either restrict access to the tree

or don't turn the lights on while the ferrets are out. Ferrets will gleefully crunch on lights, allowing you to less than gleefully pay for surgery. If your ferret wants to chew on the wires or lights, spray them with Bitter Apple. Spray while disconnected from the electricity and wait until completely dry before plugging them in again! You also need to consider the stability of the tree and how easily it could be knocked over.



*Decorations:* Seemingly innocuous decorations can cause you many headaches. Not only are they attractive to our ferrets because they're new, they often have really fun red balls and plastic leaves to munch on. Plastic holly berries could easily be swallowed, and a ferret left alone to chew on plastic holly leaves can give themselves a holiday blockage you won't soon forget. Candles (lit or otherwise)

are also a common decoration that can entice your furry friends. There have been cases where an animal has knocked down a lit candle and caused a fire. Never leave a burning candle in an unoccupied room. Candle wax could easily cause a blockage and ferrets don't seem to mind that "singed hair smell"—they'll happily stick their nose right into the center of a burning candle. Ribbons and bows can be fun, as long as your ferret doesn't try to chew on them. Foil wrapping paper could also conceivably cause a blockage if swallowed, and I doubt the inks on the rest of it would be very good for them, either.

*Gifts:* Unless you like your presents pre-opened and ventilated with lots of little holes, don't put them under the tree while a ferret has access to it. Also consider what types of toys or gifts you're bringing into your home. I had a nasty New Year's Day scare when Pepper ate a piece of a foam-backed 3D puzzle I'd gotten for Christmas. Try finding a vet on New Year's Day! If you have



children, I'd suggest not buying the Nerf toys—they're just too appealing to ferrets and too dangerous for their tummies. If you can't avoid your children getting toys that would be dangerous for your ferret, be diligent about putting everything away before your fuzzy gets out to play. Not only will the children be unhappy if the ferret ruins a new toy, you'll be unhappy when you get the surgery bill at the same time as the Christmas shopping bills hit.

*Party leftovers:* Party foods like raw vegetables, nuts, alcoholic drinks and such can be dangerous. After a party, you're often tired and likely to overlook something dropped behind a table. Your ferret won't miss it, though. Raw vegetables cannot be digested and may cause intestinal blockages. Nuts can cause a similar problem. Alcoholic drinks left sitting in unlikely places could make a ferret sick or even kill. Many ferrets like beer, wine and liquor, and it wouldn't take much to harm a 2-pound fuzzy.

### Conclusion

Having said all this, I do want to mention that not every ferret is going to do all these things. I lived 6 years with ferrets before I had one figure out how to get onto the dining room table. Before Pepper, I was able to own plants if I kept them on the counter. Before Moggie, the desk was a safe place to put things. It's just better to be aware of what a ferret might do. Get to know your ferrets and what they like to do. With a little observation and a lot of prevention, you and your fuzzy friends should be able to live together for many happy years.

Enjoy your little Agent of Chaos, and give them a kiss from me.  
Barbara Carlson

