

ferrets in need



Newsletter

Issue 11, August 2006

A bi-monthly newsletter designed to keep every member in touch with what's happening at Ferrets in Need. If there's anything you'd like to

see discussed in the next issue, or you have an article or photograph you think might be suitable for the newsletter, please contact us at

editor@ferretsinneed.org.uk, or via the contact details available on the Ferrets in Need Web site at www.ferretsinneed.org.uk

On the Move Again!

Sadly ferrets aren't as popular with everyone as they are with us, so we've had problems this year finding a regular venue for our monthly social evenings. It's even been suggested - not seriously I hasten to add - that we consider changing our name to the Ferret Nomads.

Finding a venue for owners to meet is easy enough, but we've always taken the view that ferret events without ferrets doesn't make much sense. Health and safety concerns these days though mean that many venues have become unsuitable because of the proximity of food preparation areas to where the ferrets will be. In addition to that we've long wanted to find a suitable location closer to the centre of the geographical area where we do most of our fund raising events.

So from now on our social events will be held on the last Wednesday of each month at St. John's URC Church Hall, Wilderspool Causeway, Warrington WA4 6QE.

Houdini Tara

Lara and Tara were at their evening play-time. I had put a damp canvas chair inside the front door to dry. I then heard the letter box flap clink & just thought someone had posted a flyer or note through it.

After 10 or 15 minutes I decided to have a look at it. Nothing to be seen! Thinks... I will check on the twins to see if they have

gone back to sleep and I can shut the door to their quarters. But there was only one little body in the castle dungeon. Duh. Can it be?

The inside flap to the letterbox had come off with the weight of post leaving just the fringe and the outside flap has no spring. I went outside as dusk was falling. There was no sign of Tara. I called her name and after passing by a neighbour's shed I heard a faint rustling. Could it be her?

I wrenched some planks, an old door and a heavy concrete slab away from the space between the shed and a wall and caught a glimpse of a little white form. She thought it a game and dodged back & forth for a few minutes until I grabbed her. I was exhausted but relieved.

Yes, that's right; she had climbed on the chair and, scenting the fresh air coming through the letter box, had got out through it. Yet more escape-proof measures to be considered!

Clive Williamson



Clive with Tara's twin, Lara.

Do you have an escape story that you'd like to share? Send it to us for inclusion in a future newsletter.

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Events Diary



Social evenings are now held on the last Wednesday of the month at St. John's URC Church Hall, Wilderspool Causeway, Warrington WA4 6QE
Start time is 8.00pm.

August 2006 **Saturday 12th August, Blackbrook Carnival**

Wednesday 30th August, Social Evening

September 2006 **Sunday 3rd September, Woolston (Warrington) Show**

Sunday 10th September, Rural Crafts Display Rainford

Wednesday 27th September, Social Evening

October 2006 **Wednesday 25th October, Social Evening**

November 2006 **Wednesday 29th November, Social Evening**

December 2006 **Wednesday 20th December, Social Evening**

January 2007 **Wednesday 31st January, Social Evening**

Urban Legends & Ferret Myths

Has anyone ever told you that Coca-Cola used to contain cocaine (true), or that a tooth left in glass of Coca-Cola overnight would be dissolved by morning (false)? Do you believe that the film "The Amityville Horror" was based on real events, as the film's producers claimed (false)? Or that multiplying a dog's age by 7 will give you its equivalent in human years (false)?

There are many common urban legends like those. Things we just accept because so many other people seem to believe them. Some on investigation do indeed turn out to be true, but many others are just old-wives tales, repeated so often that we just accept them as being true without really thinking very much about them.

The world of ferrets and ferreting is of course no exception. Anyone who takes their ferrets out to meet the public will typically hear some amazing "facts", and be asked some amazing questions. Like the time someone watched one of our ferrets wandering around on a lead before asking "Do ferrets have legs?".

So I thought it would be fun to look at just a few of these ferret urban legends. I promise none of these are made up. Perhaps you've heard some urban legends of your own that you'd like to share.

I'll pass over the claim, still heard depressingly often even today, that ferrets can live quite happily on a diet of bread and milk. Everyone reading this will know that to be complete nonsense anyway.

Claim: You must let a jill have a litter of kits before having her spayed, otherwise she'll be prone to ovarian cancer

Status: False

Spaying involves the removal of both the ovaries and the womb. It's really quite difficult to see how any animal could get cancer in a part of its body that's been removed.

Claim: Ferrets are descended from dogs, or ferrets are related to dogs

Status: False

Ferrets do seem to share some of the same characteristics as dogs. They're prone to some of the same diseases for instance, canine distemper being just one example. But in their eating habits ferrets arguably more closely resemble cats.

The facts are though that ferrets evolved long before dogs did. The Mustelidae group that ferrets belong to is a very ancient member of the Carnivore family. It's currently believed that the Mustelidae first appeared 16-23 million years ago. All modern dogs

are descended from the small fox *Leptocyon*, which didn't appear until 9-10 million years ago. In fact, we humans are probably more closely related to the Bush-baby than ferrets are to dogs.

Claim: Feeding your ferret raw meat will make it aggressive

Status: False

Ferrets are carnivores, they're constructed to eat raw meat, it's their natural diet. These days many pet ferrets are fed raw meat, maybe not exclusively, but the reported incidence of frenzied ferret attacks remains at about the level it always was. Somewhere around zero.

Claim: Ferrets are related to skunks.

Status: Probably false

It was certainly the case until fairly recently that skunks were considered to be members of the Mustelidae family. And with ferrets and skunks both having a similar stink defence mechanism that did seem to make some sense.

But based on fairly recent evolutionary evidence, many taxonomists now believe that skunks and ferrets are so different that skunks have been moved to their very own group, the Mephitidae. So it seems quite likely that skunks are no more related to ferrets than we ourselves are.

Do you have another ferret myth, a favourite ferret joke, story or amusing picture?
Send it to editor@ferretsinnneed.org.uk and we'll include it in a future issue.