

## Wild Weasels

By Mark Rosenstein

No, I don't mean another euphemism for ferrets. There are weasels here in Massachusetts. Three actual weasels, and two close relatives.

The most commonly seen mustelid in eastern Mass is the fisher cat. This is a larger animal, somewhat larger than a house cat. It has dark brown fur and a somewhat chunky appearance. Recently there have been a number of reports of fishers seen in the suburbs, especially in yards near wooded areas. Their name is something of a misnomer, as they are agile climbers and eat mostly small animals from the forest floor. They seldom even try to catch fish.

Another relative that can be seen with a little effort is the river otter. Also dark brown, but shaped like a ferret with webbed feet and about twice as large. They are avid swimmers usually seen in or around small streams and ponds. When



Photo by Chris Buelow  
Short-tailed Weasel transitioning from winter coat to summer color, as seen in Warren, Massachusetts.

seen crossing a road, they have a loping run similar to our ferrets. This is the best time of year to see them, late winter to early spring, at dawn near suitable waterways.

The three actual weasels in New England are very secretive and rarely seen. The largest is mink, a chocolate brown animal like a slightly oversized ferret. They are also often found near water. They have less of an arched back than ferrets, but otherwise look similar.

The other two local weasels look the most like domestic ferrets. The long tailed weasel and short tailed weasel come in shades of brown with lighter bellies, sometimes with darker points like a sable ferret. The difference between the two is subtle, in spite of their names. Short tailed weasels change their coats to white in winter, when they are also called ermine. Imagine if our ferrets shed most of their fur twice a year to change colors. These weasels are rarely seen for longer than a quick dash across a road or clearing, and are very difficult to identify in the field.

Do you want to see a wild weasel? It takes a lot of time in the field, as there is no place where they are guaranteed. Hike wild areas often enough at dawn in the spring or summer, and you will eventually run across them. I've seen river otters at Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Concord, and fishers at Dunback Meadow in Lexington. Otters are reported regularly in Assabet River NWR in Sudbury too. I know people who have seen mink in several places, most often reported from Parker River National Wildlife Refuge in Newburyport. Weasels are reported several times a year in the Quabbin Reservation.

Every now and then someone sees a wild weasel and reports it as a stray domestic ferret. Michele  
*(continued next page)*

## Thank You Phyllis

We would like to take this opportunity to say "Thank You!" to Phyllis Spy. We wouldn't be MaFF without her years of leadership and hard work behind the scenes.

Phyllis retired in December after 7 years as president of MaFF. She personally oversaw many of MaFF's programs and rescues. 🐾



Former MaFF President Phyllis Spy with Gabriel.

## Upcoming Events

For more details, please check our website at [www.mafferrets.org/events](http://www.mafferrets.org/events)

### Ferret Adoption/Education Day

Sat, 3/19/2011 1:00pm-4:00pm  
Hanover Mall Petco

### Ferret Play Date

Sun, 3/20/2011 1:00pm-3:00pm  
at Mark and Jody's in Cambridge

### Small Animal Handling & First Aid Awareness Training

Wed, 3/23/2011 3:00pm-5:00pm  
by Mass EMA in Dedham.

### MaFF General Meeting & Elections

Sun, 4/3/2011 12:00pm-4:00pm  
at Mark and Jody's in Cambridge

### Ferret Adoption/Education Day

Sat, 4/9/2011 1:00pm-4:00pm  
Plymouth Petco

### Ferret Rabies Vaccination Clinic

Sat, 4/16/2011, 9:00am-12:00pm  
by South Shore Ferret Care  
at Randolph Animal Hospital 🐾

### Cool Cribs

Whiskey, Scylla, Tuesday & Zinnia live here at Jody & Mark's.

- Ferret Nation Cage – 2 levels, usually joined, each with “loft” shelf
- Levels are easy to separate if someone is sick
- Choice of three foods offered in separate bowls (so we can track what they are eating)
- Water bowls fastened to side of cage
- Little Feet Ferret Retreat bedding set with two bed choices in each half of the cage
- Home made extra large litter box in lower level (Sterilite 28 quart storage container #1655 with one side cut down)
- Triangular litter pan in upper level
- Ramp so they can come and go on their own while the cage is open. The ramp is a vinyl clad shelf with stair tread attached for traction.
- When out of the cage, they have the run of two floors of the house. 🐾



Send **Fuzzy Papers** submissions to [publications@maferrets.org](mailto:publications@maferrets.org).

*(Wild Weasels from page 1)* reports briefly seeing an ermine in the White Mountains and spending 45 minutes outside in the rain trying to find the “abandoned ferret” before realizing it was a wild animal. If you actually manage to handle one, the difference should be apparent in disposition, coloring, and details of body shape. Beware of trying to catch these wild animals—they are very likely to bite and may carry rabies. Wild weasels may look cute in pictures, but similarities to our fuzzies are only skin deep. 🐾

**Become a MaFF Member Today!**  
Sign up on our website at [www.maferrets.org/join](http://www.maferrets.org/join)

### You Know You're a Ferret Lover When...

- You spend more on kibble and litter than you do on groceries.
- Your ferrets have nicer bedding than you do.
- None of your shoes still have their insoles.
- You have daily conversations about poop and it doesn't occur to you that some people may find that disgusting.
- When you put away your laundry you are amazed that you've ended up with matching pairs of socks.
- You at some point “lost” your keys and weren't surprised to find them in your shoes
- You've gotten into an argument with your spouse because you can't understand why he won't just give his sock to the little beast trying to pull it off his foot.
- When shopping for a couch, you spend more time looking underneath it than you do at the color. 🐾

### Meet a MaFF Member

Kathy Street, our new MaFF president has been owned by ferrets since June, 2005. She currently has 11 ferrets and five of their siblings have gone on to the Rainbow Bridge. She has been involved with MaFF since October, 2009.

Kathy says “From the moment I saw a bunch of kits I was hooked! I did a lot of reading before getting my first two and I knew they stole things, but didn't know it would include my heart. They've taught me to cherish the present because in a blink they are taken from us.” 🐾



Kathy Street with Max.

### Foster Ferret Corner

MaFF's foster mommies ask for your support as ten ferrets wait for forever homes, and 22 more need long term care. Visit [www.maferrets.org](http://www.maferrets.org) to donate and see the adoptable fuzzies. Email [fosters@maferrets.org](mailto:fosters@maferrets.org) to learn more about becoming a foster parent or adopting from MaFF.



This month's featured adoptable is Cuddles, a four year old girl who is looking for a forever home and a lot of love as a single ferret. 🐾

**The Fuzzy Papers**  
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