

Ferrets Lost . . .

SOMEONE forgot to close the door, or just didn't look when opening it. A window was left open, and there's a new hole in the screen. A hole in the wall went unnoticed until now . . . And the ferret has disappeared. What do you do?

A stray ferret has very little chance of surviving for long; usually no more than a few days. The ferret's fearlessness and curiosity can be their undoing in countless ways out-of-doors. You must act quickly and keep from panicking if your ferret goes missing.

Search Inside the House

Look everywhere in the house, high and low. Look in the usual places first, then make a list of the 10 places you'd least expect to find your ferret and look there. Chances are, you'll be relieved to find your ferret in a very odd place.

Search the Immediate Area

Take the loudest squeaky toys and that box of treats or Cheerios outside and work first around the house, then the yard, then your neighbors' houses, then the block, calling, squeaking, and shaking (the box). Stop and listen for rustling. Look under bushes, near trash cans, under cars, in garages, under porches and decks, and in gardens. Look carefully or you might miss that quizzical little face peeking back at you from behind a stump or next to a trash can, wondering what all of the fuss is about. When your neighbors come out to gawk at you, tell them what has happened.

Alert Everyone

Start with your neighbors, and especially the neighborhood children. Tell them what the ferret looks like, and what kinds of sounds it responds to. Give them your phone number. Ask them to check their basements and garages. People will help you, but you have to ask.

Call area vets, pet stores, the humane societies, the local animal control officer, the police, and the MaFF

Hotline (781 / 224 1098). The person who finds your ferret will probably be calling these places, too.

Place a 'lost ferret' ad in the local paper and with the local cable TV company. These ads are usually free.

Make flyers with your ferret's name and description, and your name and phone number. Put "LOST FERRET" at the top in writing large enough to be read from a passing car. Putting "REWARD!" on the flyer ensures that it will be read. Include your ferret's photo, or copy or trace a ferret picture from a book.

Post flyers everywhere in the neighborhood, and at the local convenience store, supermarket, gas station, and bus stops. Put a flyer in every door in the neighborhood.

Alert the building superintendents at nearby apartment buildings, the postal carrier, the UPS and FedEx drivers on your route, and utility workers if you see them.

When you find your ferret, please try to let everyone know so that we can "stand down" from the alert.

Make It Easier for the Ferret to Find Home

Ferrets follow their noses, not their eyes, so it is important to leave odor 'clues' outside. A carrier with their own used bedding in it and the contents of their used litterbox scattered all around the foundation of your house will help greatly.

Put out food and water in the carrier and check it frequently. You may also consider buying or renting a Hava-Heart-type trap (sometimes you can rent one from the local animal control officer, animal clinic, or shelter).

Keep Looking

Search your house, and then search it again. Keep looking around your neighborhood, and remind the local kids to keep looking for the ferret. Be alert for flyers or ads posted by someone who may have found a ferret.

BEFORE YOU LOSE YOUR FERRET

1. Ferret proof. Ferret proof. Ferret proof. And do it again whenever the weather changes or the furniture is rearranged.
2. Watch the door. Look down when you open the door and count noses after you close it. Create ferret-free zones between the ferrets' living area and doors to the outside.
3. Watch the windows. Never leave a window uncovered by a screen or glass. Since ferrets can shred screens with their claws, consider covering the screen with hardware mesh or chicken wire. Remove "ferret ladders" (bookcases, chairs, etc.) from beneath windows if possible.
4. Examine under sinks and in the bathroom where pipes go into walls, in the fireplace where ash cleanouts could be left open, any vents to the outside, and both ends of the dryer hose (the one that's actually connected to the dryer, not the one used as a toy). Many ferrets can open ordinary kitchen cabinets. Any of these places could appear as welcoming caves to a little explorer.
5. Count noses periodically while the ferrets are out, and especially when it gets "too quiet."
6. Train your ferret to come to you for treats when you squeak a squeaky toy or whistle. Begin by whistling or squeaking as you feed it a treat until it associates the sound with the treat. Conduct a "drill" periodically to make sure that they've learned this "trick."

If you've lost a ferret, see the MaFF website for more information and resources!

MaFF Hotline 781 / 224 1098 — Website <http://maferrets.org>

. . . and Ferrets Found!

CHANCES are that you will, at some point, come across a stray ferret in your garage, in the park, beside a road, or at the grocery store parking lot. Or, because you're known as a ferret owner, someone else will alert you to a stray that they have found. The stray ferret may be an escapee from a heartbroken owner, or an intentional release (which is illegal in Massachusetts). Whatever the cause or circumstance, you are now in possession of a stray ferret. What do you do?

Practice Compassion, but Exercise Caution

The first thing to keep in mind is that in rescuing this ferret, you have saved its life.

Be careful when handling the ferret. A sick, injured, or frightened ferret may bite. Even when you are 'sure of it,' exercise caution. If you have gloves, use them. Coax the little one into a carrier with food or treats.

If you are bitten, don't panic. Wash the affected area thoroughly with lots of soap and warm water for at least five minutes. This goes for any animal bite — stray or your own dog, cat, or ferret.

Keep the stray isolated from your own ferrets. Chances are, the little ferret is healthy and disease-free, but don't make assumptions until it has been checked by a vet. Always wash your hands after handling the stray.

If you do not have an extra cage, a large carrier will do as a temporary home.

It is very important that the stray eats and drinks. If the ferret will not eat your ferrets' or cats' food, try cooked, unseasoned chicken or turkey, warmed chicken baby food, or Nutri-Cal. Observe the ferret for signs of illness or injury — and if these are present, consult your vet.

If you need more information on how to care for the ferret, please call the MaFF Hotline 781 / 224 1098.

Spread the Word

Post flyers announcing that you have found a ferret with your name and phone number. Ask callers to describe the ferret to you.

Call area vets, pet stores, the humane societies, the local animal control officer, the police, and the MaFF Hotline 781 / 224 1098. The person who lost the ferret will probably be calling these places, too.

Keep alert for flyers or ads placed by someone who has lost a ferret.

Place a 'found ferret' ad in the local paper and with the local cable TV company. These ads are usually free.

Keep It Local

It's best that the stray stay in the same area in which it was found for a week or two, in case the owner is still looking for it. However, if you are absolutely unable to care for the ferret, ask your local vet or animal control officer whether they can foster the ferret for a couple of weeks until its owner is found. Please let them know that the MaFF Rescue / Shelter System (781 / 224 1098) will take custody of the ferret if the owner is not found. MaFF can also give them information on how to care for the ferret during the brief time that they have it.

THE LAW ON STRAY FERRETS IN MASSACHUSETTS

The intentional abandonment of a ferret is prohibited in Massachusetts. If you witness a "dumping" of a ferret, write down a description of the person and the vehicle, and the license plate number, and report it to the local Animal Control Officer or to the MSPCA. Do not confront the person yourself.

A stray ferret that bites someone has some protection under Massachusetts' 10-day rabies quarantine law, which does cover ferrets without a known history of rabies vaccination.

If the ferret (or any stray animal) has an injury that looks like an animal bite, you must call your local Animal Control Officer (ACO) for guidance. In this case, it is extremely important that you minimize your own contact with the animal, and keep it strictly isolated from your own pets. If the animal appears otherwise healthy, it will have to be quarantined by the ACO (or whomever the ACO designates) for six months.



Is There Anything We Missed?

Or do you have any questions about this information?
Your comments will help MaFF help others.

Please send your tips on finding lost ferrets, or what to do when you find a stray ferret, to:

MaFF Lost Ferret Tips

PO Box 283

Marshfield MA 02050

or by email to info@maferrets.org

If you've found a stray or abandoned ferret, see the MaFF website for more information and resources!

MaFF Hotline 781 / 224 1098 — Website <http://maferrets.org>