

TRAVELING WITH FERRETS

By Libby Nelson, AFR Journalist; **American Ferret Report**, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2013

Making several short trips to fun places with your ferrets (instead of just to the vet) will help get them used to traveling.

PACK THE ESSENTIALS

- Carriers
- Litter box
- Litter scoop and extra litter
- Extra blankets and hammocks
- A lightweight cloth or towel, preferably something that will allow air to circulate, to cover the cage and block direct sunlight coming in the car windows.
- Water bottle with water bowl under the bottle (water bottles leak). Twist-tie the water bottle to the cage for extra security, or use a spring clip. Fill the water bottle half full and freeze. When you are ready to leave, fill the frozen water bottle the rest of the way with water. Freeze home water in several bottles to act as ice for your cooler and offer drinking water as needed.
- Have more than one container of your ferret's food in the event someone spills liquid on the ferret's carrier, soaking their food, or if some unnamed fuzzy should dig out all the food and poop on it.
- Secure carriers with either seat belts or bungee cords. This is a must even for short visits to the vet: A small animal can be killed by being flung around even inside a cage or carrier. Having an animal in a carrier with lots of padding is important. Even having the carrier sideways will help, so they are not ejected forward toward the grill. Have enough carriers so there are no more than three ferrets in each. For long trips, set up a wire cage with hammocks so they ferrets can see out the windows. Have on the cage: names; ages; description or picture of ferrets; microchip tag, if applicable; allergy list or things not to be given; medications and how they are given; and the owners' name, address, and phone numbers.

SET UP AN ICE CHEST

- Include medicines and "duck soup" (for sick ferrets). Some people freeze their duck soup in ice cube trays to keep it from running together into one big glob. Cover the tray with plastic wrap to keep the cubes separate in the tray.
- Ice packs, ice blankets, or frozen bottles of water; when thawed, these could be used for water, if needed.
- Use battery-operated portable fans if air conditioning fails.

Double check before leaving home that you packed their inoculation records and rabies tags, as well as harnesses/leashes.

OTHER TIPS FOR SAFE TRAVEL

Take a playpen along, and when you stop for bathroom or food breaks, let the ferrets come out to stretch their little legs in the pen.

If stopping for meals when the weather is warm, use the drive-through instead of going in and leaving the ferrets in the vehicle by themselves. Vehicles heat up quickly, and if windows are down and the ferrets manage to get out of their cage they might be able to get out of the car, or someone might steal them.

HEAT IS A KILLER

Be aware of the following signs:

- Ferret is stressing out
- Ferret is panting
- Ferret is lethargic

A ferret that is panting is already in heat distress. Blowing air must be cooled air. It's the air moving across the moisture of sweat that cools humans—not just the moving air. Since ferrets can't sweat, we have to either provide refrigerated air (air conditioning) or moisture to simulate sweat. Have a spray bottle in a very handy place. Lightly spray your ferret and ruffle the moisture through his fur.

Spray your ferrets with water as often as you think is necessary. Essential oil of lavender has a calming effect and can be put in the water in the spray bottle.

If your ferret starts to pant, wet him down. Pour water on the ferret; wipe off the excess; repeat this procedure three or four times. If your ferret gets too hot, wrap a wet cloth around him and hold him close to the AC vent.

When the temperature reaches 75° F, you should keep a close eye on your ferret's comfort. Ferrets with insulinoma are especially sensitive to heat. If you would want to be wearing long-sleeved clothing, it's warm enough to be cautious of your ferret's heat sensitivity.

- Sunlight shining through a window directly on your ferret's carrier can heat up the carrier interior more than it affects the temperature outside of the carrier. A "baby shade" that attaches to the car window is another recommended addition.
- Carry extra water to pour on ferrets or for wetting down a lightweight cloth. You could even take one pre-wet in a plastic bag.
- If you don't have someone with you, try to place your ferrets so you can watch them at all times.

DRIVING

Run the car air conditioning as much as possible.

Put a wrapped frozen pack or frozen bottle of water in the ferret's cage. Frozen bottles should always be covered. Tube socks or sewn washcloth cases work well, as the cloth absorbs condensation and makes the bottle more comfortable for the ferret.

In some vehicles, the exhaust system is close enough to the vehicle's floor pans to cause the carpeted floor inside the vehicle to be too warm for ferret comfort. Temperatures inside a carrier sitting directly on the floor will be hotter than outside. Place another piece of luggage or some other item (books, folded blanket or quilt) under the carrier to provide insulation from floor pan heat.