

Another Landmark in Black-Footed Ferret Recovery

By Helen E. Tarbert, Director of the Black-Footed Ferret Committee

On May 9 I had the fascinating experience of observing Dr. JoGayle Howard, therogeneticist with the National Zoo, perform artificial insemination experiments at the Conservation and Research Center in Front Royal, Va., on two of the female black-footed ferrets scheduled for the procedure. (One had already undergone the operations; the fourth was yet to be scheduled.) Dr. Luis Padilla, head veterinarian at the CRC hospital, assisted. These inseminations were unique in that the sperm used had been frozen for approximately 10 years. The goal is to increase diversity in the gene pool. Remember that, at the start of the recovery effort 17 years ago, only 18 ferrets contributed to the original gene pool. Dr. Howard had employed artificial insemination annually until deciding that the natural breeding was successful enough that the technique was no longer required.

The patients were brought to the hospital from CRC's Small Mammal House, the site of housing and breeding, in small carriers similar to those that we use to transport our pets. Patient number two, whose arrival I saw, was also in a small, narrow cage inside the carrier. When she was released to be put on the oper-

ating table, we were asked to move so that the door could be closed in case she escaped.

The sperm, which had been frozen in pellet form, was brought to the room just prior to use. Immediately before thawing, the pellets were exposed to the air at room temperature for 10 seconds. They were also centrifuged for eight minutes and the post-washing motility (ability to move) was checked.

Each ferret when first anesthetized lay on her back, paws upright in the air. Now she was completely covered with a sheet, a round hole was cut in the material over the previously shaved skin over her reproductive organs. The body was also raised and tilted, moving the organs toward the front, leaving only the reproductive organs in the back. Instruments were inserted through the hole. A long, thin, corded camera was also inserted. This camera projected the organs in color on a screen beside the operating table. Dr. Howard commented that, "Everything was so small." Sperm was also injected through the hole. The patient was moved from the operating table to the carrier for recovery. Dr. Padilla reported that time for regaining consciousness varied from ferret to ferret.

Georgia, whose procedure was underway when I arrived, was born July 5, 2005. She came from the Ferret Conservation Center in Wyoming. A proven breeder, she produced two kits in 2007. Sperm given to her was from Butch, number 1323 in the studbook kept by Paul Marinari at the recovery headquarters. (We were not told Butch's age at

the time the sperm was collected.) We do know that it was frozen on March 16, 1997, May 6, 1997, February 11, 1998 and March 10, 1998. It was listed as having 35% motility. Fifteen pellets were thawed for Georgia's insemination.

Revendell, the second patient, was born on May 31, 2006, and came to CRC from the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado. Her sperm was from Rascal, ferret 1338 in the studbook. Eighteen pellets of his sperm were thawed – pellets frozen on May 6, 1997, May 10, 1997, April 8, 1998 and May 9, 1998. The motility of this sperm was 40%. All sperm was from the Genome Resource Bank. Revendell too was a proven breeder, having given birth to kits in 2007. (We were not told the number.)

Revendell was put back in her carrier to await recovery and return to the Small Mammal House. At first there was a heat light in front of the carrier. I was amused to notice that she pawed and put her mouth on the door in an attempt to escape, just as our pets do. She did not shy away or attempt to hide when I photographed her. However, Dr. Padilla turned her carrier to the wall, saying that she was not accustomed to people and should not be stressed. Some years ago, when I was admitted briefly to the Small Mammal House restricted area, one of the ferrets came to the very front of the enclosure to look me over, apparently not stressed by my presence. She had not just undergone a surgical procedure of course.

Dr. Howard stated that, in all four cases, the outcome of the experiment

continued on page 18



FERRET THIEVES

from page 12

youngest ferret, popped his head out of the guy's pocket. My boyfriend grabbed Hammie and dragged the guy out of our house.

"After a few days, we heard that Hammie had bitten and peed on the guy who tried to take him. We now have locks on our ferret cage and on the bedroom door. Hammie is happy with all of his ferret friends and family. He's still a little scared of new people, but is doing very well." (Story told by Megan from Maryland)

One of the best and most inexpensive ways you can safeguard your ferrets from potential thieves is to buy locks for your ferret cage. Multiple locks that all use the same key are commonly available at a reasonable price from hardware stores and Wal-Mart. If you do choose to keep your cage locked when you are away from home, be sure that your emergency contact person has access to a spare key for the cage.



It's unlikely that someone will ever try to steal one of your pets, but a little extra precaution can go a long way to protect them and give you peace of mind.

** Stories have been edited for content, length, and grammar.*

MELATONIN IMPLANTS: *FERRETONIN*

Take the necessary steps to assist with Adrenal Disease.

- 1 Fur Regrowth - Build Muscle - Thick Fur Clean Coat
- 2 Reduce Behavioral Problems - Reduce Swollen Vulva
- 3 Compatible with other Drugs - Assist Male Urination
- 4 Reduce Stress Pre & Post Surgery - Weight Gain

***FERRETONIN* - The Safe Alternative to surgery!
The Safe Alternative to costly human drugs!
The Safe Alternative for assistance & treatment of Adrenal Disease!**



For more information go to:

www.MELATEK.net



1-877 (MELATEK) 635-2835

**MELATONIN IMPLANT TECHNOLOGY *FERRETONIN*
HEALTHY FERRET = HAPPY FERRET**

BFF RECOVERY

from page 4

will not be known until the end of the 42-day gestation period. In the black-footed ferret false pregnancies are common; weight gain is small. By the time you read this article, there will be an answer—hopefully, the desired one.

The procedure on Revendell was photographed by a New York company for production on public television. Personnel at the CRC did not know the date of the documentary, but thought it would not appear for some time. The procedure should make an engrossing program; experiencing it in person would be an honor for any ferret lover.

Editor's Note:

Georgia gave birth to one kit on June 20, 2008. You can watch Georgia and the kit, nicknamed Peanut, at the following web-cam link at the National Zoo. Please visit the site often for up-to-date information.

<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/NorthAmerica/default.cfm?cam=BFF>