

Crystal Hartnell

Our Busy Business of Ferrets

I am the proud owner of ferrets. Or should I say they own me?

A group of ferrets is called a **business**. My business is busy. They are a cunning, clever bunch with an amazing range of personalities. The ringleader is Neo—a strong, sturdy fellow, white from head to tail. He is not an albino, so he has dark, calculating eyes.

His brother Apache is the classic ferret: raccoon-coloured with a dark mask. He loves the following (in this order): canned peaches, dirty socks, stinky insoles, rubber, and leather. Apache has perfected how to remove your insoles from your shoes and secrete them in 4 nanoseconds. He is quick.

He also has OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) tendencies. Once Apache has collected the insoles, he categorizes them in his current favourite hiding spot. All the fuzzy ones must go here, the leather ones there, and the rubber ones get piled separately.

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When my husband is feeling fatuous, he will pick up Apache, take him to the insole stash, and mix up the piles. Apache spends the next 45 minutes re-organizing the insoles into the proper groups!

Then there is Bear, a “special”

ferret in every sense. He is not very smart and is a little slower and a lot larger than the other two. When he closes his mouth, his bottom-right canine sticks out, giving him an endearing snaggletooth appearance. Bear is raccoon-coloured, too, but a warmer shade than Apache. In the ferret world, he's called a “Cinnamon.”

Imagine **the business** prowling around our home, constantly in search of adventure.

One of their more daring escapades involved their total disappearance. My husband and I were watching television together when we noticed we hadn't seen the ferrets in a while. We began looking for them in all their usual hiding places—behind the TV, in their cage, behind the couch in their dryer hose, in our sock drawers. There weren't there.



Bear (left) and Neo plotting their next adventure



Ferret cake! Apache (front) and Neo in a favourite sleeping spot



Apache checks on Neo

We started to panic, checking every nook, crack, and cranny of our house. Ferrets are designed to hunt rabbits in their burrows and can fit into a hole the size of a quarter—all except for Bear, who needs a Toonie-size space.

After a good 30 minutes of searching, we noticed the fridge was slightly ajar. We opened the door to see our three ferrets romping around in the vegetables on the bottom shelf. All three had worked together, lying on their backs to push the door open with their front paws. Then into the fridge they slid! They open cupboard doors in the same manner.

Another memorable event took place on a very hot summer evening. Dave and I had opened our screened windows to let a breeze into the living room, then decided to go sit in an air-conditioned theatre.

On our return, another panicked search ensued. The ferrets were missing. The screen from the living room window was sitting outside, between the house and the lawn.

I spent a good hour in our back and front yards with a large flashlight, calling the ferrets and trying not to wake the neighbours. By now, it was after midnight. I had visions of being arrested for creeping around yards in the middle of the night.

Then Dave hollered he had found Apache and Bear inside the dried-out ditch drain behind our house. Two were safe and sound.

But where was Neo? We looked everywhere. I finally resigned myself to the fact that he had run off and might not return. I put some of his food in various areas around the perimeter of the house and sat on our patio staring up at the stars, wishing he was home safe.

Then I heard the pitter-patter of little feet and saw him coming toward me. I rushed over and picked him up, very thankful he was back. Neo wasn't hurt but was so scared, he was trembling. I rushed him inside to be with the rest of the business. We fondly call that night "The Ferret's Great Escape."



Apache reading "Ferrets for Dummies"



Bear investigates a birthday party item

I wouldn't recommend ferrets as a pet for most people. They are very smart animals and require more care and attention than dogs. If you still think you might like a ferret to share your life, please contact the Ferret Information and Rescue Shelter and Trust Society at www.ferrets.org. ▲

*In Loving Memory of Neo
May 2001 – March 2006*

Crystal Hartnell works in Dawn Lagerbom's North Vancouver Notary practice. She is Dawn's daughter.