



## International Ferret Congress Australia

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### IFCA NEWSLETTER N<sup>o</sup> 5, JUNE 2008

We are pleased to announce that the Inaugural Ferret Health Symposium recently held in Melbourne was an outstanding success!

The event, held over 2 full days aimed to share the latest health information about ferrets and forge ties between ferret lovers Australia-wide.

Attendees agreed the weekend was a great learning experience, and had a wonderful time interacting during tea breaks, over dinner & with a few drinks at the end of the day. The raffle prizes drawn at the end of each day were also a highlight with many fantastic prizes up for grabs.



The audience were on the ball as they yelled out answers to "quick quiz" questions about each talk (although they were supposed to put their hands up to answer!). They had to get in quick to receive the spot prize of a sticker or stuffed toy.

The presentations were not only informative, but entertaining as well. One or two of the speakers (no names) also sent many of the female attendees hearts a-flutter 😊

The majority of the speakers presented up-to-date information & sound, logical advice about how to keep our ferrets at their healthiest. A minority of the speakers, although presenting excellent data & information, unfortunately still gave out-dated advice & recommendations, which were contrary to evidence presented at the Symposium (such as "feed processed foods" despite evidence of the damage they do).

All in all, it was a great weekend, and everyone who gave feedback said they would definitely attend another Symposium!




There were some constructive criticisms: One was that some folk found the noise of the hotel & aircraft somewhat disturbing at night. Another was that the late arrival of staff to open the function room on the Sunday morning was disconcerting. Lastly, the lack of internet facilities. Our next Symposium will address those issues, although grounding all aircraft at night will probably prove to be beyond our powers 😊


### OUR SINCERE THANKS TO ...


- Our speakers who gave so much of their time and expertise and who were so very friendly and approachable.
- Each and every attendee - from the locals, to those who travelled from afar (interstate and overseas), your eagerness to listen and friendliness made it a very enjoyable Symposium.
- Jan and her co-pilot, Beth, for being "Taxi Drivers Extraordinaire" in transporting folk to and from the airport and hotel.
- The four "Canberra Girls", Saskia, Thérèse, Alannah & Leanne who leapt right in and ran the raffles.
- The friendly Coolaroo Hotel staff who went out of their way to ensure that all ran smoothly.
- Jaikoy and Thumbtack, the ferrets, who endured a bit more handling than what they are generally used to, with good spirits...except for when Jaikoy got spooked by a loud car and bit Lori's lip during the Age photo shoot. Woops.



### PHOTOS & VIDEO ...

 Photos of the Symposium are available on our web site at [www.ferretcongress.org.au/photos.toy](http://www.ferretcongress.org.au/photos.toy) (or follow the links from the homepage). If you have any photos you would like to share, please email them through to us or post us a CD.

 You can also purchase a CD copy of the photos for \$5.00 including postage. The photos on the CD can be viewed either on your TV (using a standard DV player) or on your computer.

 DVDs of the Symposium presentations will be available for sale in due course.



## SYNOPSIS OF THE PRESENTATIONS ...

### History of Domestication - Bob Church

Bob discussed the history of ferrets throughout the ages, including references in art, poetry & texts. He showed the likely predecessor of our Domesticated Ferrets, and the most likely timeframe of domestication.

RIGHT: Bob Church



### Blockages - Dr David Neck

Dr Neck outlined the signs and symptoms of intestinal blockages and a number of various items that cause them. Foam earplugs were high on the list. He described how most blockages were not visible by x-ray and that it was often necessary to perform a laparoscopy when no other reason for a ferret's illness could be found.



### Natural Diet and Periodontal Disease - Dr Tom Lonsdale

Dr Lonsdale discussed the health problems associated with feeding our pet carnivores (dogs, cats, ferrets) processed foods such as biscuits & canned food. He also spoke of what the ferret's natural diet would feature (by looking at polecat diet studies) and the health giving benefits of feeding our ferrets these foods. Lastly, he discussed the issues & obstacles which need to be overcome in order to get this important health message out.

ABOVE: Dr Tom Lonsdale

### Enrichment - Bob Church

Bob spoke about how it is generally accepted that pets have the right to food, shelter & freedom from pain, however their other needs are generally ignored (particularly with ferrets) - these include expression of normal behaviour & freedom from stress. He explained that we can understand the domesticated ferret's needs & behaviour by looking at the polecat, and seeing how they use their body & mind. He shared multiples studies which show that providing enrichment reduces stress in a range of animals; and that we can provide enrichment to our ferrets in a variety of ways (food, interesting living areas, sleeping boxes, human interaction) for healthier, less stressed ferrets.

### Ferret Proofing - Shirley Hewett

Shirley showed some practical examples of ferret-proofing inside and out, which could be used to enhance the quality of life for ferrets by providing them with an interesting & large living area. She used the 6 "S" points to consider when deciding on a ferret's living area: Space to run, safety, security, sharing, \$\$\$ (cost) and sunlight.

RIGHT: Dr Jerry Murray

### Adrenal Disease - Dr Jerry Murray

Dr Murray described how adrenal disease, the #1 ferret health problem in the US, was diagnosed by hair loss, sexual aggression and, in males, urinary



blockage. He outlined the treatments, including surgery and different types of implants. He described how early neutering & constant artificial lighting may be the cause of its prevalence in the US.

### **Teeth & Diet - Bob Church**

Bob showed some amazing slides of damaged ferret teeth caused by kibble, cage-biting and cloth-chewing. He also showed the damage done to the supporting bone by periodontal disease. These were compared to the healthy teeth and bone structure of wild polecats.

### **Sarcoptic Mange - Dr Lynda Bonning**

Dr Bonning described how sarcoptic mange was caused by a microscopic mite which burrowed under the skin. The most common effect in ferrets is "footrot". While topical treatments have little or no effect, Dr Bonning recommended using Revolution for treatment and prevention.

### **Insulinoma - Dr Jerry Murray**

Dr Murray described how the over-production by the beta cells in the pancreas causes symptoms ranging from "spacing out" to screaming seizures and death. He discussed the surgical and medical treatments currently available and that the cause was likely an over-abundance of carbohydrates in the diet.

### **Diet Logistics - Shirley Hewett**

"Jaikoy" showed that eating mice was a very enjoyable experience for ferrets and Shirley explained how ferrets are not just meat-eaters, but that whole carcasses are their perfect diet. If whole small prey is not available, this can be replicated by feeding small raw meaty bones with occasional offal. She went on to discuss where to source different diet items.

RIGHT: Shirley Hewett with Jaikoy



### **Cardiomyopathy - Dr David Neck**

Dr Neck explained that there were two types of heart disease but the most common type that affected ferrets was dilative cardiomyopathy where the heart muscle becomes too thin & weak to pump blood effectively. He went on to describe the signs, symptoms and current treatments.

LEFT: Dr Dave Neck

### **Heartworm - Dr Lynda Bonning**

Dr Bonning discussed the diagnosis of heartworm and how it is spread. She noted that it was a rare occurrence in the southern parts of Australia, but in warmer areas such as Queensland it would be more prevalent. She recommended Revolution as preventative treatment.

## MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE SYMPOSIUM...

We've included snippets of the media coverage that this year's Symposium attracted. To read the full stories, check the "media coverage" page on our web site.



THE AGE

"Love at first bite"

A half page spread on the back page of The Age newspaper (Melbourne) featured information about the Symposium & ferrets in general. The caption was incorrectly labelled as Shirley Hewett, and is actually Saskia Hornig (with Thumbtack the ferret).

Ferrets Magazine (online) featured an article titled "Symposium In Australia Focused On Ferrets"



Ferret information flowed freely between 41 ferret enthusiasts in Melbourne, Australia, on May 3 and May 4 during the 1st Ferret Health Symposium. Attendees even included veterinarians from Canada and Western Australia.

"Without a doubt, the highlight of the symposium was the almost immediate camaraderie between all attendees," said Shirley Hewett, an organizer of the event and one of the founders of the International Ferret Congress Australia.

RIGHT: Dr Dave Neck at the Symposium



## SO WHEN IS THE NEXT SYMPOSIUM?

Thanks to the support of speakers and attendees that we received at this year's Symposium, we are pleased to report that a 2<sup>nd</sup> Ferret Health Symposium will be going ahead. This will be held in Sydney in mid to late 2009!

