Using Scruffing as a Restraint in Ferrets for Grooming & Other Procedures

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Scruffing means taking a firm hold on the loose skin of the ferret's nape of the neck, and gathering it into a bunch. Ferrets control each other by gripping the back of the neck with their teeth – mother ferrets carry their offspring that way, and when they are too big to be carried, they drag them by the scruff. Ferrets usually become passive and submissive when scruffed. Instead of turning and twisting around, most ferrets will hang limply from your hand and seem to be in a trance for a short time. Scruffed ferrets will usually yawn, sometimes repeatedly. Scruffing makes it possible to treat the ears, trim nails, examine the teeth, or administer oral medications with little stress to any of the participants.

Occasionally ferrets, particularly those that have lived several years with the same owner without ever having been restrained, will simply not tolerate scruffing. They struggle and emit heart-rending shrieks, working themselves into panic attacks at the very thought of being scruffed. Some of these spoiled ferrets can be bribed with a steady supply of their favorite treat (Nutri-Cal® or Drs. Foster & Smith Vitacal® usually works well). Others require short-acting gas anesthetics when it is necessary to treat their ears or perform other simple procedures.

CAUTION: When scruffed, even ferrets that do not bite will close their jaws firmly on anything that goes into their mouths, so keep your fingers out.

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