

Specialists in animal behavior recently studied two specimens of an almost extinct species of ferret (*ferretus doggettus*). Their findings shed some light on a little-known type of study, vestigial behavior.

The pair of doggetts observed, a male and a female obviously past their prime, inhabited <sup>American and</sup> European hotel rooms. Their frantic scurryings and forays, apparently unrelated to foodgathering, security, or reproduction, led the scientists to speculate that their instincts had at one time served them in a different habitat and ~~were~~ <sup>had been</sup> possibly meaningful in some remote time.

The doggetts <sup>are</sup> were occupied during most of their waking hours with papers which they manipulated in various ways. They spread them out, piled them up, crammed them into the interstices of pouches, perforated them, and sometimes crumpled and shredded them. The male frequently made marks on them with a ball point pen. The female marked them with a typewriter which she operated crudely with her forepaws. None of the paper-related behavior suggested that the doggetts were nesting, but one of the observers advanced the theory that in a previous habitat paper was used to line the doggettburrows. This he inferred from the spreading-out behavior.

Doggetts communicate with low-pitched cries which sound something like "developdevelopdevelop" and "lesotholesotholesotho." When agitated they utter sharp little yelps: "UNDP! UNDP!"

The doggetts make frequent paper-gathering forays into office buildings. There they encounter friendly specimens of a related species which provide them with the paper they so urgently seek. However, they are rewarded with the paper only after conforming to an elaborate ritual. First there is a brief spasmodic contact of a doggett forepaw with that of the other species.

Then there is sustained vocalizing, teasing exhibition of desirable papers, withdrawal of papers, some scurrying in corridors, and much marking on papers which the doggetts have brought with them in curious pouches. At length additional paper is surrendered to the doggetts by the denizens of the office buildings, and they scamper exultantly back to their burrow in the hotel. Observers are frankly puzzled by this interchange between the species. Fribblehof suggests an analogy to the worker ants who serve other species of ants. ~~In the case of ferrets it is difficult to see which species dominates, if indeed there is the ancillary relationship Fribblehof postulates. No other theory has been advanced.~~

In spite of their woefully confused attempts at adaptation to the hotel environment, the doggetts do not appear completely untrainable. They can manipulate simple machines, as the aforementioned ball point pen and typewriter. They are capable of punching elevator buttons, although frequently they punch the wrong one and grope confusedly down tunnels that do not lead to their burrow. ~~Door keys and telephones are within their limited competence.~~

Hotel personnel consider doggetts a nuisance but not a plague. Since the species is rapidly achieving its own extinction, there is no danger of infestation by doggetts. The few which do appear can easily be controlled by clobbering <sup>with</sup> big bills. In the dining rooms and bars doggetts can be discouraged simply by being ignored. ~~by waiters.~~ *Waiters ignore them completely.*

The doggetts exhibited no territorial instinct whatever. They changed burrows frequently. They ~~are~~ sometimes observed in airports and train stations, where their most pathetic adaptation problem manifested itself. Mandelklutz opines that the doggett subspecies evolved from a marsupial branch of the

of once had a <sup>now</sup> ferret, which ~~eventually~~ the pouch, eventually atrophied. The modern doggetts, ~~holders~~ <sup>from</sup> unlike their better-equipped ancestors, struggle with numerous fabricated pouches, all crammed with paper, which they clutch and drag feverishly from burrow to distant burrow.

Although the species is dying out, the mobility of the few remaining specimens makes it not unlikely that they will be encountered by the general public from time to time. Scientists assure us that they are almost completely harmless. Anyone cornered by a frantic doggett need only offer it a wad of paper and the doggett will be instantly mollified.