

# Ferrets

## Fans hunt support for legalization

Continued from Page B-1

California is the only state in the union that bans domestic ferrets as pets, and as many as 3.5 million of them are kept as pets throughout the nation, said Pat Wright, 34, a North Park resident who organized the rally.

Possession of a ferret is a misdemeanor punishable by a six-month jail sentence and a \$1,000 fine per offense — a good reason most of those at the rally left their furry friends at home.

There's a major misunderstanding, these owners contend. The ferret has an image problem. He's inaccurately perceived, they say, as a threat to infants and a predator of poultry.

Hogwash, says Wright.

"I just received a report from the Centers for Disease Control today that says there is not one reported incident of a ferret attack in the state," Wright said.

"Ferrets chase cats, and cats ambush ferrets."

But ferrets, Wright conceded, do attack vacuum cleaners.

"You have to ferret-proof your

house, because whatever is at ground level can be at risk," Wright said. "They'll dig up your house plants . . . That's their charm."

State Sen. David Kelley, R-Hemet, who has heard the pro-ferret lobby before, quotes a letter by a state health official in stating his opposition to legalization.

The letter says ferrets have been known to attack infants, inflicting hundreds of bites, then to "drink the victim's blood and eat the shredded tissues."

But don't tell that to Nancy Erhart, 35, a registered nurse who lives in La Mesa. She says the cute, cuddly creature she owns, which answers to the name Scooter, is as harmless as a teddy bear.

"Scooter doesn't bite or scratch," Erhart said. "When I take her outside, she walks on a leash."

Another ferret owner, Shannon Tatum, 26, of Santee, brought a poster with photographs of Bart, her 5½-year-old pet.

"I don't take him outside," she said, "but I would if ferrets were legal. He's a great pet: low maintenance, you don't have to walk him, and he doesn't bark."

"It's like having a kitten for his whole life."

A kitten with more courage than you can wag a tail at.

"I have a Rottweiler, too," Tatum said, "and Bart stands right up to him. On his hind legs."

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