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We are grateful that you have chosen us to help you with your pet's health care. If you have questions concerning any subject related to your pet's health, please feel free to contact us. One of the technicians or doctors will be happy to help you.

## **FERRETS**

Ferrets are known for their cat-like and sparkling personalities! Although they are not ideal in a home with small children, they're usually very friendly towards humans. They've become one of the most common pets in the U.S. next to cats and dogs. Belonging to the weasel family, their relatives are mink, skunks, otters and badgers. Their average lifespan is anywhere from 5-10 years depending on their health status. Their winter coats allow them to tolerate the cold weather very well while their summer coats are useful for living in dry mild climates. Female ferrets tend to weight around 2 pounds while males are typically double the size of females.

Their colors vary including shades of brown, grey and black around the face whereas their feet and tails are usually the darkest in color. Some ferrets can be considered "Albino" with white fur and pink eyes although there are ferrets who aren't albino that have white or light-yellow fur with black eyes.

### HISTORY

The scientific name for the ferret is *Mustela putorius furo* which means "little smelly thief." Descended from the Eastern or Western European polecat, ferrets have been domesticated since 300 BC to be used for rodent control. The Black-footed Ferret is not the same as a domesticated one. They are considered an endangered species and only distantly related. Ferrets have been domesticated as long as cats have, not as long as dogs have.

### HOUSING AND ENRICHMENT

Depending on the climate in which you live, ferrets can be housed outdoors as long as the appropriate measures are taken. The same measures have to be taken for ferrets who live indoors as well. When they're not in their cage, it's very important to make sure the area they are in is completely safe and ferret proofed.

The bottom of furniture such as beds and couches should be covered with a thin piece of plywood, hardware cloth, or even Plexiglas® to prevent them from burrowing. Not only is burrowing damaging to the furniture but it can also pose a problem for your ferret if they ingest the foam or rubber inside. Foam and rubber can also be found in dog or cat toys. Make sure to keep these toys from laying around and keep them out of reach. Reclining chairs are an example of furniture pieces that we highly recommend you get rid of completely. They tend to be very high on the list of causing injuries to ferrets.

Ideally, cages should be roughly a meter tall and at least have enough space for a ferret to have separate areas for sleeping, eating, playing, and a litter pan. That's right, ferrets can be litter trained! Typical cat litter is not

#### Sources:

- (1) South Wilton Veterinary Group [www.southwiltonvet.com](http://www.southwiltonvet.com):  
"Introduction to Ferrets" "Housing Ferrets" "Feeding Ferrets" "Ferret Behavior" "Common Illnesses"  
(2) Brown DVM, Susan. "Living With Ferrets" *VeterinaryPartner* 28 April 2008  
(3) Quesenberry, Katherine and James Capenter. *Ferrets, Rabbits, and Rodents: Clinical Medicine and Surgery*. Saunders, 2012.

recommended for ferrets but rather a pelleted or shredding bedding is preferred. Also, they tend to use the bathroom in corners or where there is a vertical surface.

Be sure to give your ferret plenty of enrichment as it is very important to them. DIY toys such as PVC pipes are a great use of tunnels for them to play in. Another at-home option are digging boxes. Ferrets love to dig and burrow as mentioned before so creating a specific area/toy for them to dig and bury in gives them much joy. You can make a digging box by filling a plastic container with sand or rice and cutting a hole in the lid that's big enough for the ferret to crawl in but small enough to keep the contents inside.

## BEHAVIOR

Ferrets love outsmarting their owners and tend to set the rules of the house including establishing their territory and taking stuff that doesn't belong to them. They love to explore and hunt, especially in pairs. When they're not full of energy, they love curling up in a warm place like their owner's lap. They tend to sleep 18-20 hours of the day with a couple short bursts of activity throughout the day.

When they're not sleeping or playing, their high metabolism forces them to eat. Ferrets will wake up every few hours just to eat for a couple minutes; this is after shivering for up to 20 minutes to increase their body temperatures from their sleep.

Ferrets tend to have a reputation for curiosity and investigating things they are not supposed to which leads them to accidents in the household. This is why it is super important not to leave your ferret unsupervised when he or she is out-and-about playing. Be cautious when closing any doors of appliances or cabinets as they tend to nestle in areas such as these.

Ferrets have many behaviors related to play and play "hunting" which confuse or even frighten people unfamiliar with ferret body language. The most common action is the "war dance," where the ferret arches his back, throws his head back with teeth bared, fluffs up his tail, and maniacally bounces forward, backwards and sideways. As crazy as your ferret may seem, it is simply a form of play. If you imitate him, he will get even more excited and start chasing you, stop suddenly, turn and run inviting you to now chase them.

Ferrets don't realize that humans don't have thick fur like they do so if/when they bite or nip too hard during play, do what comes natural to you and yelp in pain. Once they recognize that what they did was painful to us, they tend to change the way they play with us as to not cause damage.

## DIET

Ferrets are truly carnivorous. To meet their nutritional requirements, they have to consume animal tissue. They're designed to eat small, whole prey items. Fruits and vegetables are not as significant to a ferret's diet as they are to a human's diet. Because of their high metabolism and short GI tract, they need a diet highly concentrated in fat and high-quality protein with minimal carbohydrates. The food should contain roughly 30-35% protein and 20% fat.

We recommend exposure to a variety of foods early as ferrets tend to be very picky when it comes to what they eat. A combination of whole prey (cooked, human-grade meat) weekly and dry kibble daily split into 3-4 meals. Vitamin supplements are not necessary as long as the ferrets are being fed a high-quality diet. Some

ferrets love Linatone or Ferritone vitamin supplements, but they're usually just given as a reward for good behavior or a distraction during a veterinary procedure.

## VACCINES

**Rabies:** This vaccine is given once each year and is required by law in some states but not all. It is recommended for ferrets who both remain indoors and who go outdoors ever.

**Distemper:** Also given once a year to fight against canine distemper and other viruses. Outbreaks of distemper in ferrets are usually fatal.

Ferrets do tend to have a higher risk of vaccine reactions. After vaccines are administered, ferrets should be monitored in the hospital for about 20 minutes following.

For this reason, distemper titers are also an option that you can discuss with the doctor about at your visit.

## NEUTERING, SPAYING, AND DE-SCENTING

Spaying and neutering is always recommended even in ferrets as it will drastically reduce their odor as well as extend their lives. It's suggested to get them fixed before they reach sexual maturity. The majority of time, ferrets will already be fixed by the time of purchase or adoption. Marshall Farms is a commercial breeder based in New York that commonly sell to pet stores across the U.S. Ferrets coming from Marshall Farms are almost always fixed and de-scented.

If you're ferret has not been altered, consult with one of our exotic doctors about what is recommended for surgery.