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Ferret Care

Ferret Basics

- Lifespan: 5-8 years
- Weight: Males 2-4 lbs (neutered)
- Females 1 ½ – 2 lbs (spayed)

Housing: House ferrets in rabbit or larger sized cages. Most ferrets will use a litter box. Ferrets can be destructive if left to run free unsupervised, and will definitely eat things you may not suspect (especially if left to run unsupervised).

General Information

There are two varieties of ferrets, based on coloration:

- “Fitch” ferrets are buff with black masks, feet, and tails.
- “Albino” ferrets are white with pink eyes.
- Females are called “Jills” and males are called “Hobs.”
- Baby ferrets are called “Kits.”

Ferrets are born deaf and blind. Their period of pregnancy is 42 days. The kits’ eyes and ears open at 3-4 weeks of age. Their temporary teeth begin to erupt at 14 days of age, at which time they begin to eat solid food. The permanent teeth erupt at 47-52 days of age. The kits are weaned by the time they are 8 weeks old. They reach their adult weight at 4 months of age. The average life span of a pet ferret is 9 – 10 years.

Hobs are usually twice as large as Jills, but both sexes undergo weight fluctuations of 30-40% of their body weight. Fat is added in the fall, and lost in the spring.

Ferrets have paired musk producing glands beside the anal opening, which secretes when the animal is angry, excited, or in estrus (heat). These glands may be removed to reduce (not eliminate) the musky odor, which makes them a more pleasant pet. They do not have self-developed sweat glands, and are prone to heat strokes at temperatures above 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Ferrets typically have good personalities and adapt well to human companionship, particularly if they have been raised from infancy in close human contact.



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There is NO natural animosity between the ferret and the dog or cat. They are inquisitive and playful by nature. When given supervised freedom in which to satisfy their innate curiosity (and inclination to burrow), they need no special equipment. Some pet ferrets have even been trained to walk with a leash and harness. Because they tend to urinate and defecate in habitual places, they are easily trained to use a cat litter box.

Other

- Kits should be dewormed at the time of initial vaccination.
- Yearly fecal examination should be performed by your veterinarian to check for any intestinal parasites.
- Flea products that are safe for cats should be used on ferrets.
- Ferrets are very susceptible to ear mites and should be examined often by the owner when there are other pets in the household, which could transfer this disease.

Ferrets - Sexuality, Diet, and Vaccinations

Sexuality

- Ferrets reach sexual maturity in the spring following their birth.
- Usually they are 9 – 12 months of age when they reach sexual maturity.
- Breeding season is from March to August, but ferrets can be bred year-round if the light is controlled at 16 hours each day.

The Hobs' breeding readiness is signaled by the descent of the testicles into the scrotum. The testicles remain in the scrotum ONLY during the breeding season. Unless breeding is planned, CASTRATION is RECOMMENDED at six months of age to decrease aggressiveness and the musky odor.

Onset of estrus (heat) in the Jill can be recognized by enlargement of the vulva. Ovulation is induced by copulation (breeding), and if fertilization fails to occur, a pseudo-pregnancy of 42 days will occur. Jills may remain in estrus for up to six months if copulation does NOT occur. Jills NOT INTENDED for breeding SHOULD BE SPAYED AT 6 MONTHS OF AGE!! Because they remain in heat for prolonged periods of time, a condition called HYPERESTROGENEMIA occurs. This causes fragile bones, ANEMIA, poor blood clotting, and sometimes, DEATH!



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Diet

- Pet ferrets are easily maintained with commercial cat food (dry) supplemented with occasional cooked liver or meat scraps. Ferrets have little, if any, capacity to digest fiber (basic component of most dog food). They do NOT need to eat mice or other rodents
- Small bones should be withheld from the diet to prevent them from becoming lodged in the mouth, stomach, or intestine.
- Fresh water, in either a cup or drinking bottle, should be available at all times.

Schedule of Care

- 2-4 Weeks: First canine distemper vaccine
 - Optional fecal exam
- 6-8 Weeks: (After 1st Visit) Canine distemper booster
- 3 Months: Rabies vaccine
- 4-8 Months: Castrate or spay
 - De-scent optional
- Yearly: Canine distemper and rabies vaccine boosters.

After three years of age, we recommend an exam every six months with a complete workup, including yearly blood work.

* Note that neutering ferrets markedly decreases odor without de-scenting as most ferret smell is from glands in the skin. Tattoos in your ferret ears indicate he/she have already been neutered/spayed and de-scented.