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FERRET CARE

Vital Statistics

Life expectancy	5 - 9 years	Weaning	6 - 8 weeks
Breeding	4 - 8 months	Pregnancy	42 days
Litter size	1 - 18	Adult body weight	0.5 - 2 kg

Ferrets are **carnivorous** animals whose relatives include the weasel, mink and otter. They are very inquisitive by nature and will explore their surroundings endlessly. They are sociable, clean animals & readily enjoy human companionship. They display many of their instinctive traits such as play & hunting & can provide endless appeal in their frolicking behaviour. There are many coloured varieties including the 'fitch' or 'sable' (cream undercoat with black feet, tail & a black mask on their face), albino & cinnamon.

Housing

- They should normally be **cage confined** when they're not under direct supervision. However they require daily interaction and **play time** in a safe area outside of their normal confinement. This will also help maintain their bond to you
- They **enjoy exploring** so try 'rearrange' their cage furnishings regularly (provide boxes, plastic tunnels etc)
- They may especially prefer to sleep in a small cosy area
- Ferrets **like to chew**, so be careful of objects around the home or in their cage that may tempt them. Swallowed objects can become hazardous by way of intestinal obstruction
- Ferrets are readily 'toilet-trained' as they often prefer to toilet in corners. Place litter boxes in the corners of cages & in the corner of each room that they play in. Suitable litter types include shredded paper or recycled paper cat litter
- Ferrets are **vulnerable to heat stress**, ensure the area they're kept in won't become too hot
- Ideally, the ferrets need to be exposed to 'normal' day/night cycles throughout the year. Some occasional exposure to sunlight may also be beneficial

Handling

- Ferrets will often play-bite or '**nip**' when playing. They need to be taught at a young age that biting people is inappropriate
- If required, ferrets can be gently '**scruffed**' by being held from the back of the neck. This may help to calm them down and can be used with a verbal 'no' if they have bitten you

Feeding

- Ferrets are **strict carnivores**. In the wild they prey upon and eat whole animals. They require a diet of meat/animal products that are typically high in protein and fat and low in carbohydrates and fibre
- There are some good quality commercial ferret foods available in Australia but they're not always easy to come by. The alternative is to offer a constant supply of **high quality commercial dry kitten food**. Recommended brands include Hill's® Science Diet Kitten Food and Iams® Kitten food
- Offering them **raw meaty bones** on a weekly basis will also aid in keeping their teeth clean
- **Treats** such as fruits and vegetables can be offered, but only in minute quantities. They should be soft and easily digestible, such as melons, pear, etc.
- Clean **fresh water** should be available at all times in the form of water bottles or heavy bowls
- Nutritional supplements should not normally be necessary

Health & Veterinary care

- All ferrets should be **vaccinated against canine distemper**. Two vaccinations are required if the ferret is less than 14 weeks old and thereafter a yearly booster vaccination is required
- Ferrets need to be on a monthly **heartworm preventative** such as Revolution®
- Have your ferrets vet checked yearly while young and then twice a year after the age of 3 or 4 years
- Ferrets will need to be **desexed and/or 'chemically' sterilised**. New products such as Suprelorin® are now registered for use in ferrets. Each individual's scenario is different and you should discuss the options with your ferret savvy vet. It is vital that female ferrets do not remain 'in heat' as this can be life threatening. Ferrets usually reach puberty from 6 months old, and **it is vital** that you seek advice on this by this time
- It is good idea to quarantine any new ferrets for at least 4 weeks before introducing them to your other ferrets