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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 however 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® or Heartguard®
- Have your ferrets vet checked yearly while young and then twice a year after the age of 3 or 4 years
- **Desexing** is recommended for males & is a **MUST for females** from around 6 months of age/before first heat
- It is good idea to quarantine any new ferrets for at least 4 weeks before introducing them to your other ferrets