

that your ferret is a household pet just like most cats and dogs, and is very unlikely to have rabies. DESPITE STATE AND FEDERAL GUIDELINES, AUTHORITIES MAY TRY TO CONFISCATE YOUR PET AND KILL IT FOR RABIES TESTING. If this happens contact the Kansas City Ferret Hotline immediately. It is illegal for authorities to take your ferret from your home without a search warrant.

A Word About Harnesses and Leashes, Bells, and Name Tags...

Generally I do not recommend a harness or leash for ferrets. Ferrets may hang themselves from any attachment and die. They don't need one indoors and it's not a good idea to walk your ferret out of doors. Once a ferret is used to walks, it is more likely to attempt to get out of the house on its own. If you must use a harness, it must be secure on your ferret. Be sure that you can get your finger into the harness alongside your ferret's neck. Call us for advice about ways to help find a lost ferret. Teach your ferret to come to a squeaky toy by rewarding her with a treat such as Ferretone.

This pamphlet was prepared by the Kansas City Ferret Hotline, with acknowledgments to Ferret Fanciers of Greater Milwaukee, and is made available to ferret fanciers everywhere. Tax-deductible donations to support public education about ferrets and the rescue (as well as adoption of lost, abandoned, abused, and unwanted ferrets) may be made to: KCFHL, 904 E 28th St., Kansas City, MO 64109.

Some Knowledgeable Local Veterinarians

Dr. Dianne Barr 6300 NW Highway 9; Parkville, MO 64152 (816) 741-2247
Dr. Dean Kolich 5418 NE Antioch Rd.; Kansas City, MO 64119 (816) 453-4700
Dr. Richardson 8201 East 87th St.; Kansas City, MO 64138 (816) 765-7979
Dr. Larry Snyder 2619 SW 17th St.; Topeka, KS 66604 (785) 233-3185
Gladstone Animal Clinic 7027 North Oak Trfwy.; Gladstone, MO 64118 (816) 436-1100
Twin Pines Veterinary Clinic 209904 State Route K; St Joseph, MO (816) 364-1089

Favorite References:

Schilling, K. Ferrets for Dummies

Jeans, D. A Practical Guide to Ferret Care. 2nd Ed.

Shefferman, M. (ed). The Wit and Wisdom of the Modern Ferrets

Websites: www.ferrethotline.com; www.ferretcentral.org; www.ferretcongress.org;
www.myspace.com/kcferret

Email: kcferrrethotline@yahoo.com; rmccanse@kc.rr.com

Ferret Mailing List: email: ferret-l-request@LISTSERV.FERRETMAILINGLIST.ORG

Supplies: (800) 496-3335 www.ferretdepot.com; (888) 833-7738 www.ferretstore.com;
(800) 865-1333 www.petfooddirect.com

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Kansas City Ferret Hotline

Adoptions Coordinator: Sharon (816) 569-3472

Bobbi (816) 842-3707



Kansas City Ferret Hotline

(816) 569-3472 www.ferrethotline.com

Adoptions • Give-ups • Information

General

Ferrets are curious, playful, and very mischievous animals. They are never ordinary and are by no means a pet for everyone! Ferrets are small, quiet, affectionate, and great companions for apartment dwellers. They get along well with most cats and dogs. Ferrets are not recommended as pets for small children and they may not be the ideal pet for you, especially if they must be kept constantly caged. Ferrets have a normal life span of 6-8 years; they are a high maintenance pet because they need love, exercise, and human attention. They will require costly veterinary care as they become older. If you can make the extensive commitment ferrets require, welcome to the joys of ferret companionship.

History

Ferrets are member of the Mustelid family. They are distantly related to the black-footed ferret and also to mink, weasels, polecats, and otters but THEY ARE NOT WILD ANIMALS. They are not related to rodents, such as mice and rats. Black or white "ferrets" found outdoors are usually misidentified mink or weasels. Ferrets are not a new animal. They were domestically bred about 3,000 years ago. Ferrets were used in Greece and later more widely in Europe for hunting rabbits. In the US and England, they have been used for rodent control in granaries, ships, and on farms. Commodore Frank Noble of the colonial navy of Massachusetts proclaimed the ferret an official mascot saying "...there is one animal the rats and the mice could never escape... This animal was one of mans best friends and totally fearless ...". Ferrets were, at one time, bred for their fur, called fitch. And, sadly, they are used extensively in viral research.

Ferrets are burrowers and generally do not climb very much, although there isn't a place where a ferret can't get if it really wants to. The ferret we know is not a wild animal and cannot exist on its own. A FERRET SHOULD NEVER BE TURNED LOOSE BECAUSE IT WILL NOT SURVIVE. Ferrets are totally dependent upon their human companions for survival. Although the endangered wild North American black-footed ferret is similar in appearance to the domestic ferret it is only very distantly related.

Should I Choose A Male or A Female Ferret?

Males (hobs) grow to be somewhat larger than females (jills) and tend to have a more relaxed deposition. Hobs average 3-4lbs as adults and they will grow to about 20 inches in length plus tail. Males also develop a stronger musk scent, which can be improved by having the animal neutered. Descending can be a traumatic surgery for ferrets and is not recommended; as it does not change the way the ferret smells. Jills are often more energetic than hobs, weigh an average of 1-2lbs and grow from 12-15 inches in length plus tail. Jills have a less noticeable odor. Lately ferrets have been bred for size so individual animals may be much larger (or smaller) than stated here.

Spaying Is An Absolute Must for all female ferrets unless the animal is to be bred. Breeding is expensive and difficult. Estrus, or heat, is very dangerous for female ferrets. If they are in heat for a period of time they will develop severe anemia and fatal infections.

A female ferret generally comes into heat the first spring following her birth and she will remain in heat until she is bred or treated with a hormone injection to terminate estrus. This injection is only a short-term solution and the ferret will, after a brief respite, come into heat again. Responsible breeders will encourage you to neuter or spay your ferret when it is about 6 months old. Neutering male ferrets is sometimes delayed to encourage larger growth and fewer health problems. Most ferrets from pet stores are already neutered or spayed and may have a breeder's mark, a small blue dot or two, tattooed on one ear. The cost of spaying and neutering is comparable to the cost of similar surgery for a cat. Recommended veterinarians in Kansas City area (below) can give you more information.

How Do I Care For My Ferret?

Ferrets need yearly vaccination against rabies & canine distemper. Distemper is always fatal. An initial inoculation and a booster at times specified by your vet are required. Mosquitoes carry heartworm to ferrets as well as other pets. Ferrets also develop earwax that can be gently removed. Small cotton swabs and Oti-Clens (from the drug store) should be used. Clean only the outer ear area. Heavy wax build-up may indicate infection or ear mites. Nails should be trimmed regularly with cat nail clippers. Your ferret may catch its nail and tear it, or not be able to get free of a piece of fabric caught on a rough toenail. Clip only the ends beyond the pink area and keep a styptic substance on hand. An occasional bath with mild baby or ferret shampoo can be fun for all. Be sure bathing and drying areas are warm.

What Do I Feed My Ferret?

DO NOT FEED DOG FOOD OR ANY GROCERY STORE CAT OR KITTEN FOOD.

We recommend a good grade of ferret food such as Innova Evo, Zupreem or Totally Ferret from the pet store or online. Do not feed cheaper brands such as Wal-Mart or cat food. Malnourished ferrets may lose hair or develop blindness and other side effects. Ferrets are small animals requiring food that is high in meat protein (38% or more) and fat (20%), minerals and other nutrients, low fiber (<2%) and certain ash components, and with few chemical additives. They are obligate carnivores and only meat protein is digested. Again, beware of generic or cheap brands. Your ferret will normally gain weight in winter and lose in the summer. Her coat will also vary seasonally, so a plump ferret is not necessarily a fat ferret.

Some ferrets like cooked chicken or turkey as a treat. Raisins are high in sugar and hard on teeth; vegetables also should not be fed. Dairy products will cause diarrhea and foods with refined sugar or chocolate should never be given. If you decide to feed your ferret natural foods, check with a veterinarian about nutritional requirements to make sure your pet is getting everything it needs. Ferrets drink a lot of water, so their supply should always be fresh, plentiful, and easily available. A large water bottle or heavy dish that cannot be tipped over will keep your ferret from becoming dehydrated.

Where and How Do I House My ferret?

Keep your pet inside the house where it is warm in winter and cool, under 80 degrees, in summer. Ferrets easily suffer heat stroke. Ferrets are a caving animal and feel secure in small spaces. It is not cruel to cage them. Although you should cage your ferret it must still have some time *every day* to run around free in a safe area of the house. You should cage your ferret at night and when you are not at home. A cage must be large enough for the litter box, a place to sleep and an area where your ferret can eat, drink and move about. **DO NOT USE AN AQUARIUM.** Ferrets must not be able to get through the bars of the

cage. They have been known to chew through screening. Self-stick floor tile makes a good floor for the cage. Wire floors can cause foot deformities. Clean the cage frequently with natural cleaner like a small amount of baking soda in water. Fasten a litter box in one or more corners. Provide a warm piece of material for your ferret to sleep in, an old flannel shirt or nightgown is wonderful. Do not use toweling or other fabrics that may catch on claws. Ferrets also like hammocks. You can make one by tying the corners of a blanket to the cage bars. Cedar or pine chips or self-clumping litter can make your ferret sick! Wood stove pellets for pellet stoves is cheap and works well for litter.

Be sure that your house is ferret proof. Any hole, air duct, loose floorboard, or door that can be opened, will be thoroughly explored. For a lost ferret, check the refrigerator, the dryer, inside a mattress or box spring, furniture upholstery, laundry basket, etc.

How Will I Exercise My Ferret? Do Ferrets Play?

Ferrets jump up and down, turn somersaults, run sideways, slide and nearly turn inside out playing. They will run and hide, play tag, attack and chase you or other animals. Ferrets chuckle when they are playing and happy and also when they are anxious. When they are having a wonderful time, or are excited or frightened, their trails get bushy and look like bottlebrushes. In addition to chuckling, they may hiss and wag their tails. If your ferret is cornered or threatened it is capable of an ear-piercing screech. All-time favorite toys are a very noisy paper bag, a long PVC tube large enough to move through freely, or a cardboard box that can be climbed into and out of. Never give a ferret anything it can get its teeth caught in such as rawhide, rubber, or plastic toys. Besides catching the ferret's teeth, pieces of these can be ingested and cause a fatal blockage. Note: Ferret heads can get stuck in paper towel tubes. Large balls that can be pushed around are fun. There are many safe play things your ferret will discover around the house that don't cost a cent and provide hours of fun. Expect them to steal and hide your stuff and to dig in your plants.

Young ferrets (kits) go through a playful biting stage. Biting hurts and occasionally causes a bleeding finger or toe. Ferrets will also "fright bite" if startled or suddenly disturbed, by a noisy or curious child for instance. Some ferrets take delight in being naughty. Discourage biting with a loud firm "NO" and "time out" in a cage. Consistent correction works best. Remember that a ferret is tiny and a slap or a kick can hurt it severely. Reward your ferret with a special treat when it is good. Ferrets are intelligent, affectionate, they wish to please you, and will usually mellow with age.

Walking Your Ferret

Exercise is very important for your ferret's health. Many do well on a secure harness and light leash. However, I do not recommend walking your ferret out of doors for several reasons. Remember that a strange sound or a sudden approach from another animal will cause your ferret to react quickly. He may bite or run away. Ferrets suffer from heat exhaustion quite easily (never leave your ferret in a car in the summer). Always carry along a water bottle. If he becomes overheated or starts panting wrap the ferret in a cool damp towel and call your vet. And remember that salted sidewalks in winter can burn ferret feet. Additionally there is a risk of heartworm for any ferret exposed to mosquitoes. *A Special Word of Caution:* Ferrets being walked attract a lot of attention. People will come up to you and may reach out to your ferret suddenly. Warn people before they approach that the ferret may bite even though you are fairly certain it won't. If your ferret does bite someone, **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE.** This can be a very serious situation. Be sure to keep your ferret's rabies vaccine up to date. They are rabies resistant, but you will probably be unable to convince someone (or someone whose child has just been bitten)