

Ferrets

Mustela putorius furo

Introduction and Origin

Ferrets are playful, energetic little pets that are thought to be descended from the European Polecat, and closely related to the Skunk, Otter, Mink, and Badger. A female ferret is called a “Jill” and grows to between 30 – 40cm long. A male

ferret is called a “Hob” and grows to between 45 – 60cm long. Young ferrets are called “Kits” or “Kittens”. The average lifespan of a ferret is 6 – 9

Ferrets have relatively poor eyesight but a keen sense of smell and hearing.

years, and they come in various colours from the more common albino and sable, to black eyed white, chocolate, silver mitt, butterscotch and cinnamon.

Housing

Wire cages with several levels inside provide the best home for your ferret as they allow good air circulation, are easy to clean and allow your ferret to see and be part of their surroundings. Whether it is an indoor cage or an outside aviary, it needs to have a litter tray, hammocks and/or beds, a ceramic food bowl, a water bottle and toys. The litter tray should be placed away from food and bedding and filled with a dust free litter which needs to be changed daily. Ferrets sleep for up to 18 hours a day on average so a comfortable sleeping area is a must. Ferret hammocks make cozy beds as ferrets like to hide while sleeping. Bedding needs to be washed weekly and the whole cage should be cleaned



thoroughly once a week with a small animal safe disinfectant.

Ferrets are extremely susceptible to heat fluctuations, so frozen water bottles in their cage and even a cool bath can help combat this problem.

Diet & Water

Ferrets are carnivorous and require a diet that is high in protein. This is easily accomplished by feeding a high premium quality kitten dry food until they are 3 – 4 years old and then moving them on to a high premium adult cat food. Dry food is preferable for healthy teeth and gums, and should be put in a heavy bowl that isn't easy to tip over. Dry food should be available all the time as ferrets are prone to low blood sugar levels (hypoglycaemia). Raw minced lamb, beef and chicken can also be given in addition to their dry food. Raw chicken necks or wings are great for cleaning teeth so can be offered once or twice a week. Never feed dairy, chocolate, sweet biscuits, cooked bones, salt, or any hard vegetables that could cause blockages. Have fresh drinking water available at all times.



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Worming, Vaccination and Flea Prevention

Ferrets need to be wormed every 3 months with a cat all wormer paste for intestinal worms, and should be given Ivomec (from your vet) monthly for heartworm prevention. They need to be vaccinated at 6 – 8 weeks old, again at 14 – 16 weeks old and then yearly against Distemper and Hepatitis. Ferrets should be treated with a parasite control product monthly to protect against fleas - consult your veterinarian for dosage rates. Ferrets can also catch a cold or flu from us humans and again they need to see a vet for treatment.

**Learn more
from the team
at Kellyville Pets**

Training

Ferrets play quite roughly with their litter mates as youngsters so tend to be a

bit nippy with their new owners. This behaviour needs to be shown as unacceptable right from the very beginning. If your ferret nips you, simply give a quick, light flick on the nose with your finger and give them a stern “no” to help discourage this unwanted behaviour. It is also a good idea to teach your ferret to come when they are called. Find a treat that your ferret loves like meat and always reward good behaviour. Always handle your ferret calmly and with confidence and be consistent and patient with training.

Toilet training is usually relatively easy as the use of a litter tray is imprinted on them by their mother. If, however, your ferret doesn't know how to use a litter tray, simply pick up their “accidents” and place them in the litter tray. Even when you change the litter, leave a little faecal matter in it to encourage them back.

Ferrets can become friends with cats and dogs if introduced at a young age, a harness is the best way to ensure they are safe while they are out of the cage as they are inquisitive and will try to get into the smallest of hiding places.

Your ferret could enjoy a cat scratching post almost as much as a cat.

Grooming

Ferrets can be bathed in lukewarm water with a ferret or kitten shampoo to help control their musky odour. Be sure not to wash your ferret too often, as too much bathing can dry out their skin, which means more oil is produced, and therefore more smell. Clean your ferret's ears out weekly with a cotton bud moistened with a mild ear



cleaner, gently wiping away any wax or dirt from the folds of the ears. Trim the nails as often as necessary with cat nail clippers making sure not to cut into the quick.

Desexing

Desexing is highly recommended for both males and females, and should be done at around 6 months of age. Both will reach sexual maturity at 6 months old, and then the female will come into season around September and will stay in season until she is mated, desexed, or given an injection to bring her out of season. During this time, males can lose up to 40% of their body weight and their coats yellow with all the extra oils being excreted, making their musky smell extra strong. If the female is left in season she will become anaemic as her high levels of oestrogen stops the bone marrow from producing red blood cells, which usually proves fatal.

Further information on diet, hygiene, worming, vitamins, Vets and much more is available from the team at Kellyville Pets.

At Kellyville Pets, we encourage responsible pet ownership.

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