

## Ferret information sheet

### About ferrets

Ferrets are part of the Mustelids family. They are related to Polecats, Weasels, Minks, Badgers and Otters etc. They are a small carnivorous species with ancestors being the wild European Polecat. Female ferrets are called Jills and male ferrets are called Hobs, with babies being called kits.

Ferrets have a life span of 6-10 years and can live comfortably indoors and outdoors (although outdoors is preferable to their circadian rhythms). Ferrets are also highly social animals needing to be in a pair or more. Ferrets can bond and when they lose a friend, they may get depressed. It is recommended to always have a friend for your ferret. There is the occasional ferret, who will not get on with other ferrets. These ferrets are recommended to live inside with a lot of human interaction and free roam time. Ferrets have a set breeding season starting from early spring and ending late summer time.

### Breeding season and neutering

Females will have a swollen vulva and act more aggressive when in season. They are induced ovulators and will come into season and stay in season until brought out. Ways to bring them out of season includes; a hormonal jab called jill jab, a Vasectomised hob, a hormonal implant or by having a litter. Prolonged oestrous can cause aplastic anaemia and the jill can potentially die if not brought out.

Males will come into rut around the same time. They need to be separated from other ferrets, as they can fight and potentially cause serious damage to another. They also cannot live with spayed jills when they are entire, due to potential mating when the jill is not in season. This can cause serious damage to the jill internally.

We recommend neutering ferrets at the correct age. 6 months + for a hob and 8 months+ for a jill (after they have come into season and been brought out). Neutering at the correct age reduces the risk of hyperadrenocorticism (adrenal disease).

Other ways to neuter include a hormonal implant which chemically neuters both jills and hobs. Vasectomies are available for males in order to keep them entire and bring jills out of season without impregnating them. (Most vasectomised hobs will need to be kept separately during breeding season).

### Diet

Ferrets are obligate carnivores, meaning they need a high meat-based diet. Like a cat they also need taurine added to the diet. They can get this through the secreting organs of their food such as the heart and liver. Alternatively, they can be fed a commercial ferret or cat kibble with added taurine. Kibble that includes high plant mater, especially peas are not recommended. Kibble should be given 24/7 as ferrets will eat little and often, due to their short digestive tract.

Ferret kibbles

- Vitalin
- Science selective
- Dr Johns
- Alpha

- Hopewells
- Burgess

Cat kibble

- Iams vitality kitten
- Thrive
- Applaws
- Ziwi peak

Raw food can be given in the form of whole prey and mince. Mince needs to be 80/10/10; 80% muscle meat, 10% bone, 10% organ. This is the best diet for a ferret being the most realistic and closest to their dietary needs. This can be given twice a day as a sole diet or alongside a good quality kibble once a day.

### **Housing**

Ferrets smell! They do have a musky odour and housing them inside or outside is a personal choice (neutering will reduce the smell drastically).

Housing a ferret needs to be very secure. This is because they are very good escape artists. Ferrets are also not caged animals. They need a lot of space and free roam time. A commercial hutch can be used with a run; however, this needs to be secured so they cannot escape. A converted dog run or shed is recommended, as it gives ferrets the space they need.

Ferrets can also have a cage indoors; however, they need a minimum of 6 hours free roam time a day. Ferrets can free roam in your house, confining them to a room which is specifically ferret proofed. A two-story cage is perfect for when they do need to be secured.

Within the housing, lino on the flooring is a must as they will poop every 4 hours and lino is easy to clean. Cat towers can be given as enrichment, along with cat toys, puppy toys and tunnels. Ferrets are prone to eat things they shouldn't so all toys should be supervised.

Cat beds and dog beds are a must for endless cuddle piles. Along with hammocks and boxes with lots of blankets.

A bowl of water should be placed inside the enclosure at all times. Bottles can be given as a backup but never for a main water source.

### **Bathing**

Bathing should only be done, if necessary, i.e., they have poop on them. This is because this can dry out the ferret's skin and cause dermatitis. Shampoo and soap should not be used, only an oatmeal bath should be given (a sock of oats soaked in water).

**For information on ferret illnesses, please check out our website [Marley's Ferret Rescue and Rehoming](#).**