AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CALIFORNIA FISH AND GAME COMMISSION REGARDING

Domestic Ferrets in California

The ferret issue has been going on in California for a long time. While residents in 48 states are enjoying legal ferret ownership, California is locked in a ferret ban.

Fish and Game controls ferrets because they can label ANY ANIMAL as “wild” – even when scientifically invalid.

OUR PETITION SIMPLY REQUESTS

that the Fish and Game Commission issue ferret permits, each at a cost of $100 or more, for pet ferrets that are sterilized and current on rabies vaccination.

This is something the Commission can do without any changes in regulation.

2118. It is unlawful to import, transport, possess, or release alive into this state, except under a revocable, nontransferable permit as provided in this chapter and the regulations pertaining thereto, any wild animal of the following species: ...all members of the Mustelidae family... ferrets!

There were two objections recently stated by Fish and Game Staff to removing ferrets from the prohibited species list:

#1 Staff recommends denying the petition. Given that the proposed action would effectively eliminate the Commission’s authority to regulate ferrets,...

By issuing permits, the Fish and Game Commission will maintain its jurisdiction. Ferrets are the only domesticated animal on the prohibited species list, classified as a wild animal simply for being a member of the Mustelidae family.

#2 Regarding potential impacts to wildlife populations, the report finds that while the establishment of feral colonies is highly improbable, there is a remote possibility that escaped ferrets might do significant damage to wildlife...

We have letters on file from all 50 states responding to: “Are there any instances of domesticated ferrets killing or harassing wildlife in your state?” Everyone answered “No” or “Don’t know” – not one “Yes”!
Ferrets are the only domesticated animal on the prohibited species list, classified as a wild animal simply for being a member of the Mustelidae family.

This is the explanation I received from the Legislative Analyst’s Office:

From: Favorini-Csorba, Anton [mailto:Anton.Favorini-Csorba@LAO.CA.GOV]
Sent: Monday, April 02, 2012 9:48 AM
To: cliffnotes@legalizeferrets.org
Subject: Inquiry with LAO

Hi Pat,
My name is Anton Favorini-Csorba and I’m the analyst with the Legislative Analyst’s Office with responsibility over the wildlife policy area. We received an inquiry from you on the Fish and Game Commission’s authority to regulate domestic animals, specifically as it pertains to ferrets. In general, the Commission and the Department of Fish and Game have relatively broad authority to regulate the importing and possession of non-native species, and so that extends to ferrets. Regarding your specific question about domestic animals, it’s my understanding that currently ferrets are considered wild animals under state law. Fish and Game Code section 2118(b) lists animals of the families Viverridae and Mustelidae as restricted, and I believe ferrets fall into the latter. Furthermore, the Commission is the body that determines whether an animal is wild or not because the Commission is charged with determining whether an animal is “normally domesticated in this state,” (FGC section 2116). So that would indicate to me that the Legislature has declared its intent on the Commission’s authority.

Hopefully that answers your question, although I realize it may not be the answer you were looking for.

Best,
Anton Favorini-Csorba
Fiscal & Policy Analyst
Water, Agriculture, and Wildlife
Legislative Analyst’s Office

Is it fair that the agency that issues hunting and fishing licenses is charged with regulating a cute, furry PET? We have very little common ground here. Ferrets are domestic animals and should be regulated by the Department of Agriculture as are dogs and cats. How would California hunters respond if their permits were issued by PETA?
Officials from these three state agencies have gone through considerable expense to produce “reports” to back up their position. Most notably are these two reports. **They have one thing in common:** Begin with the position that ferrets pose various threats and work backwards. Neither has been peer reviewed and both are significantly lacking in documentation.

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**PET EUROPEAN FERRETS: A HAZARD TO PUBLIC HEALTH, SMALL LIVESTOCK AND WILDLIFE**


*From the Executive Summary:* Ferret play frequently assumes the form of mock attacks, which may result in bites to humans. Serious bites may occur, especially if the animal is surprised or angered. Adults are able to quickly terminate such encounters, and thereby limit injury. However, infants, who often seem to be perceived by ferrets as prey, may suffer severe injury as a result of ferret attacks. Indeed, ferrets sometimes unleash frenzied, rapid-fire bite and slash attacks on infants, usually on their heads and throats, and sometimes inflict hundreds of bites. The animals have been reported to then drink the victim’s blood and eat the shredded tissues.

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**Proceedings of the Sixteenth Vertebrate Pest Conference:**

**THE EUROPEAN FERRET, MUSTELA PUTORIUS, (FAMILY MUSTELIDAE) ITS PUBLIC HEALTH, WILDLIFE AND AGRICULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Jim C. Hitchcock, California Department of Health Services, Vector-borne Disease Section, Ontario, California 91764.

*Abstract:* The European ferret, Mustela putorius, a species prohibited in California, has become increasingly popular as a household “pet.” As a result, its threat to public health, wildlife and agriculture has markedly increased. There has also been a consequent increase in reported attacks on humans, especially infants, including several fatalities. Reports of rabid European ferrets are also on the increase. When European ferrets establish “feral” populations, domestic poultry, waterfowl, game birds, rabbits and other species are at substantial risk. At this time, a California Proc. 16th Vertebr. PestConf. (W.S. Halverson & A.C. Crabb, Eds.) Published at Univ. of Calif., Davis. 1994.
Ferret proponents have been working toward legalization since about 1988.

2004

Several bills have been through the legislature. The last one, SB84 (Dede Alpert) passed— but was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger.

“I love ferrets,” Schwarzenegger wrote in his veto message to the California State Senate. “I co-starred with a ferret in Kindergarten Cop. However… I am concerned that there has not been proper study to determine whether ferrets are detrimental to the health and safety of California citizens and the environment.”

Most recently, the Fish and Game Commission rejected a petition for regulation change to remove ferrets from the prohibited species list.

Ferrets as Wild Animals?
§2116. Wild Animal As used in this chapter, “wild animal” means any animal of the class Aves (birds), class Mammalia (mammals), class Amphibia (frogs, toads, salamanders), class Osteichytes (bony fishes), class Monorhina (lampreys), class Reptilia (reptiles), class Crustacea (crayfish), or class Gastropoda (slugs, snails) which is not normally domesticated in this state as determined by the commission.

Everyone knows domestic ferrets aren’t wild animals.

What we don’t know is when the Fish and Game Commission ruled that ferrets are not normally domesticated in this state.

We are being UNFAIRLY penalized because ferrets ARE domestic animals.