



Tracking Number: (2019-018)

To request a change to regulations under the authority of the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission), you are required to submit this completed form to: California Fish and Game Commission, 1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1320, Sacramento, CA 95814 or via email to [FGC@fgc.ca.gov](mailto:FGC@fgc.ca.gov). Note: This form is not intended for listing petitions for threatened or endangered species (see Section 670.1 of Title 14).

Incomplete forms will not be accepted. A petition is incomplete if it is not submitted on this form or fails to contain necessary information in each of the required categories listed on this form (Section I). A petition will be rejected if it does not pertain to issues under the Commission's authority. A petition may be denied if any petition requesting a functionally equivalent regulation change was considered within the previous 12 months and no information or data is being submitted beyond what was previously submitted. If you need help with this form, please contact Commission staff at (916) 653-4899 or [FGC@fgc.ca.gov](mailto:FGC@fgc.ca.gov).

### **SECTION I: Required Information.**

*Please be succinct. Responses for Section I should not exceed five pages*

**1. Person or organization requesting the change (Required)**

Name of primary contact person: Pat Wright  
Address: 4515 Panorama Dr, La Mesa CA 91941  
Telephone number: 619-757-7426  
Email address: [CLIFFNotes@legalizeferrets.org](mailto:CLIFFNotes@legalizeferrets.org)

**2. Rulemaking Authority (Required)** - Reference to the statutory or constitutional authority of the Commission to take the action requested: **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: Mammals of the orders Primates, Edentata, Dermoptera, Monotremata, Pholidota, Tubulidentata, Proboscidea, Perissodactyla, Hyracoidea, Sirenia and Carnivora are restricted for the welfare of the animals, except animals of the families Viverridae and **Mustelidae** in the order Carnivora are restricted because such animals are undesirable and a menace to native wildlife, the agricultural interests of the state, or to the public health or safety.

**3. Overview (Required)** - Summarize the proposed changes to regulations: Domestic ferrets do not belong on a list of **Wild Animals**. It is 100% inaccurate and makes any chance at legislation unlikely.

**4. Rationale (Required)** - Describe the problem and the reason for the proposed change: Ferrets are domestic. Other organizations and elected officials are using this classification: that the California Fish and Game Commission (The "Experts") classify domestic ferrets as wild animals as their justification to support a continued ban on a domestic animals. The Fish and Game Commission is using objections by "environmentalists" as a reason not to act on reclassification, but the Sierra Club is using Fish and Game's classification of domestic ferrets as being wild to continue their opposition to ferret legalization.



## SECTION II: Optional Information

5. **Date of Petition: July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019**
6. **Category of Proposed Change**
- Sport Fishing
  - Commercial Fishing
  - Hunting
  - Other, please specify: non marine animals
7. **The proposal is to:** *(To determine section number(s), see current year regulation booklet or <https://govt.westlaw.com/calregs>)*
- Amend Title 14 Section(s):
  - Add New Title 14 Section(s):
  - Repeal Title 14 Section(s):
8. **If the proposal is related to a previously submitted petition that was rejected, specify the tracking number of the previously submitted petition 2016-008**  
Or  Not applicable.
9. **Effective date:** If applicable, identify the desired effective date of the regulation.  
If the proposed change requires immediate implementation, explain the nature of the emergency:
10. **Supporting documentation:** Identify and attach to the petition any information supporting the proposal including data, reports and other documents: Attached with this email are articles from Wikipedia, PETA and ADW all claiming domestic ferrets are domestic animals.
11. **Economic or Fiscal Impacts:** Identify any known impacts of the proposed regulation change on revenues to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, individuals, businesses, jobs, other state agencies, local agencies, schools, or housing: Charge a fee necessary to cover the cost of issuing permits.
12. **Forms:** If applicable, list any forms to be created, amended or repealed:

## SECTION 3: FGC Staff Only

Date received: Received by email on Wednesday, July 10, 2019 at 9:58 AM.

FGC staff action:

- Accept - complete
- Reject - incomplete
- Reject - outside scope of FGC authority

Tracking Number 2019-018



Date petitioner was notified of receipt of petition and pending action: August 6, 2019

Meeting date for FGC consideration: October 9-10, 2019

FGC action:

- Denied by FGC
- Denied - same as petition \_\_\_\_\_  
Tracking Number
- Granted for consideration of regulation change

**Kinchak, Sergey@FGC**

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**From:** FGC  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 10, 2019 9:58 AM  
**To:** Cornman, Ari@FGC  
**Cc:** Kinchak, Sergey@FGC  
**Subject:** Fw: Petition for Regulation Change  
**Attachments:** 07-10-9 Petition asking DFG to issue permits.docx; 071019-ADW\_ Mustela putorius furo\_ INFORMATION.pdf; 071019-Wikipedia.pdf; 071019-Facts on Ferrets \_ PETA.pdf

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**From:** CLIFFNotes@legalizeferrets.org <CLIFFNotes@legalizeferrets.org>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 10, 2019 08:28 AM  
**To:** FGC  
**Subject:** Petition for Regulation Change

LegalizeFerrets.org  
PO Box 1480  
La Mesa, CA 91944  
619-303-0645 or cell 619-757-7426  
California Fish and Game Commission  
P.O. Box 944209  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

July 10, 2019  
Re: Petition To The California Fish and Game Commission for Regulation Change

Dear Fish and Game Mangers,

Please consider this supporting letter to the also attached petition.

We are asking you to not refer to domestic ferrets as wild animals.

When we previously asked the commission to remove ferrets from the list of prohibited wildlife I was told by Mr. Sklar that it was more complicated than I realized. That "environmentalists" would sue the Commission if they acted upon it. He advised me to get the support of a legislator because legislation is not subject to CEQA.

We have tried on many fronts to gain the support of a legislator. Support for ferret legalization is hampered by opposition from the Sierra Club among other groups. Here is one comment:

*"Sierra Club has long opposed holding wild animals as pets, but particularly when those animals could present a problem if they accidentally or intentionally are introduced into the state's natural areas. There are many, many examples of exotic critters that have become problems in California after being introduced into the wild. One that I am very familiar with is the bull frog, which has helped push out other amphibian species in certain habitats since its introduction in the 19th century."*

Kathryn Phillips kathryn.phillips@sierraclub.org

We are asking the Sierra Club to reevaluate their position, but they have not yet responded to us. However, an out of state member received this response:

*I have checked with the chairman of the Sierra Club California conservation committee and he reports that our position is to follow the lead of the California Fish and Wildlife Department, which is concerned that if pet ferrets were to escape, they would threaten native wildlife. The Sierra Club position is to support the state wildlife professionals. If the agency changes its position and finds that ferrets pose no threat the Sierra Club will consider changing its position at that time. I'm very sorry that you feel you must resign your membership over this issue when there is so much else we agree upon.*

*Bruce Hamilton <bruce.hamilton@sierraclub.org>*

We thus have a circular reference. You, the Fish and Game Commission, have told us you won't move on ferrets for fear of being sued by "the environmentalists." The Sierra Club, the nation's premier environmental organization, will not move on the issue until the California Fish and Game Commission alters the classification of domestic ferrets as wild animals.

This isn't fair to us, ferret enthusiasts. There are no studies or reports that show the domestic ferret as wild. The domestication process is quite objective – by every measure ferrets are domestic.

We are chipping away at this slowly. This is a request for your agency to quit referring to domestic ferrets as wild animals which will help us find a legislative sponsor.

Sincerely,

Pat Wright

Received by email on Wednesday, July 10, 2019 at 9:58 AM as attachment 1 to petition 2019-018

# Animal Diversity Web

University of Michigan Museum  
of Zoology.

## *Mustela putorius furo* domestic ferret

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By Jessica Duda

Geographic Range	Communication and Perception	Conservation Status
Habitat	Food Habits	Other Comments
Physical Description	Predation	Contributors
Reproduction	Ecosystem Roles	References
Lifespan/Longevity	Economic Importance for Humans: Positive	
Behavior	Economic Importance for Humans: Negative	

### Geographic Range

Currently almost no progress has been made in determining the center of the domestication of ferrets. It is thought that ferrets may have been domesticated from native European polecats (*Mustela putorius*). There is evidence of domestic ferrets in Europe over 2500 years ago. Currently domestic ferrets are found around the world in homes as pets. In Europe, people sometimes use ferrets for hunting, which is known as ferreting. (Davidson 1999, Schilling 2000)

**Biogeographic Regions:** nearctic ( introduced ) ; palaearctic ( native ) ; oriental ( introduced ) ; ethiopian ( introduced ) ; neotropical ( introduced ) ; australian ( introduced )

### Habitat

The native habitat of domestic ferrets were forested and semi-forested habitats near water sources. Domestic ferrets are kept as pets or as working animals in human habitations.

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### Classification

Kingdom  
Animalia  
animals

Phylum

Other Habitat Features: urban ; suburban ; agricultural

## Physical Description

Domestic ferrets reach their adult size at one year old. A typical female domestic ferret weighs from 0.3 to 1.1 kg. Domestic ferrets exhibit sexual dimorphism. Male domestic ferrets can weigh from 0.9 to 2.7 kg, neutered males often weigh less than unaltered males. Domestic ferrets have a long and slender body. Females are typically 33 to 35.5 cm long and males are 38 to 40.6 cm long. Average tail length is 7.6 to 10 cm. Domestic ferrets have large canine teeth and 34 teeth total. Each paw has a set of five, non-retractable claws.

Domestic ferrets have been bred for a large variety of fur colors and patterns. The seven common fur colors are called: sable, silver, black sable, albino, dark-eyed white, cinnamon, and chocolate. The most common of these colors is sable. Examples of pattern types are: Siamese or pointed patterned, panda, Shetlands, badgers, and blazes.

Aside from selection towards particular fur colors, domestic ferrets closely resemble their wild ancestors, European polecats (*Mustela putorius*).

(Schilling 2000)

Other Physical Features: endothermic ; homoiothermic ; bilateral symmetry

Sexual Dimorphism: male larger

### Range mass

0.3 to 2.7 kg  
0.66 to 5.95 lb

### Range length

33.0 to 40.6 cm  
12.99 to 15.98 in

## Reproduction

Male domestic ferrets will mate with as many females as they have access to.

Mating System: polygynous

Male ferrets have a hooked penis. After penetration of the female, they can't be separated until the male releases. Males will also bite the back of the female's neck while mating. Domestic

Chordata  
chordates

Subphylum  
Vertebrata  
vertebrates

Class  
Mammalia  
mammals

Order  
Carnivora  
carnivores

Family  
Mustelidae  
badgers, otters,  
weasels, and  
relatives

Genus  
*Mustela*  
ermine, ferrets,  
minks, and  
weasels

Species  
*Mustela putorius*  
European polecat

Subspecies  
***Mustela putorius furo***  
domestic ferret

ferrets have a seasonal polyestrous cycle. Male domestic ferrets go into rut between December and July. Females go into heat between March and August. Males are ready to breed when they develop a discolored, yellowish undercoat. An increase in the oil production of the skin glands is what causes the discolored undercoat.

A female in estrous is identifiable by a swollen pink vulva due to an increase in estrogen. Females can go into lactational estrous on some occasions. Lactational estrus occurs if the litter size is less than 5 kits. Lactational estrus is when the female will go back into estrous while lactating the litter that she just had. Healthy domestic ferrets can have up to three successful litters per year, and up to 15 kits. Gestation length is about 42 days. Young domestic ferrets are altricial at birth, and need about 8 weeks of parental care. Kits are born deaf and have their eyes closed. Newborns typically weigh about 6 to 12 grams. Baby incisors appear about 10 days after birth. The kits eyes and ears open when they are 5 weeks old. Weaning of the kits is done while they are 3-6 weeks old. At 8 weeks, kits have 4 permanent canine teeth and are capable of eating hard food. This is often the time that breeders let the kits go to new owners. Female kits will then reach sexual maturity at 6 months old. (Kaytee 2001, Schilling 2000)

**Key Reproductive Features:** iteroparous ; seasonal breeding ; gonochoric/gonochoristic/dioecious (sexes separate) ; sexual ; fertilization ( internal ) ; viviparous

<b>Breeding season</b>	<b>Range number of offspring</b>	<b>Average gestation period</b>
Breeding occurs between March and August.	15 (high)	42 days

<b>Range weaning age</b>	<b>Average age at sexual or reproductive maturity (female)</b>	<b>Average age at sexual or reproductive maturity (male)</b>
3 to 6 weeks	6 months	6 months

Young domestic ferrets are cared for by their mothers until they are about 8 weeks of age.

⋮ **Parental Investment:** altricial ; female parental care

## Lifespan/Longevity

Domestic ferrets will not survive long in the wild. As pets, they can live from 6-10 years. There are a few diseases and disorders that can shorten the life of domestic ferrets if not treated. Some of these diseases and disorders include: canine distemper, feline distemper, rabies, parasites, bone marrow suppression, insulinoma, adrenal gland disease, diarrhea, colds, flus, ringworm, heat stroke, urinary stones, and cardiomyopathy. (Kaytee 2001, MNAALAS date unknown, Schilling 2001)

### Typical lifespan

**Status:** captivity

6 to 10 years

## Behavior

A healthy domestic ferret will often sleep 18-20 hours per day. Domestic ferrets are naturally crepuscular, having activity periods during dawn and dusk. They will often change this activity period depending on when their owner is around to give them attention. Domestic ferrets are playful and fastidious. They will often interact with other pet ferrets, cats, and dogs in a friendly manner. Domestic ferrets will seek attention. They are naturally inquisitive and will tunnel into or under anything. They can be taught tricks and will respond to discipline. Domestic ferrets have an instinct to habitually urinate and defecate in the same places, and therefore can be trained to use a litter box.

Domestic ferrets use a variety of body language. Some of these behaviors are dancing, wrestling, and stalking. They will 'dance' when they are happy and excited, hopping in every direction. Wrestling is a behavior that includes two or more ferrets. They will roll around with each other, biting and kicking, usually in a playful manner. Stalking is sneaking up on a toy or other animal in a low crouched position. (MNAALAS date unknown, Schilling 2000)

⋮ **Key Behaviors:** crepuscular ; motile ; sedentary ; social

## Communication and Perception

Domestic ferrets have many forms of verbal communication. They will ‘dock’ or ‘cluck’ as sounds of giddiness or excitement. They will ‘screech’ as a sign of terror, pain, or anger. They will ‘bark’ if they are very excited. Finally, a domestic ferret will ‘hiss’ if it is annoyed or very angry at another ferret or animal. (Schilling 2000)

**Communication Channels:** visual ; tactile ; acoustic ; chemical

**Other Communication Modes:** scent marks

**Perception Channels:** tactile ; chemical

## Food Habits

Domestic ferrets are natural carnivores, and require a meat-like diet. Food for domestic ferrets should contain taurine and be composed of at least 20% fat and 34% animal protein. Most domestic ferrets are fed manufactured ferret, cat, or dog food. They can also be fed raw meat, but that alone is not sufficient. If they were in the wild, they would get nutrients from eating all parts of an animal, such as the liver, heart, and other organs. Sometimes domestic ferrets are fed supplements (like vitamins) to make up for nutritional requirements that commercial foods don’t meet.

The metabolism of a domestic ferret is very high and food will travel through the digestive tract in 3-5 hours. Therefore, a domestic ferret will need to eat about 10 times each day. Domestic ferrets also have olfactory imprinting. What ever is fed to them for the first 6 months of their life is what they will recognize as food in the future. (Schilling 2000)

**Primary Diet:** carnivore ( eats terrestrial vertebrates )

## Predation

Domestic ferrets don’t have any natural predators since they are domesticated. Predators such as hawks, owls, or larger carnivorous mammals would hunt them given the opportunity. Domestic ferrets on the other hand can be predators to certain animals. They have been known to kill pet birds. Domestic ferrets will also hunt rabbits and other small game when their owners use them for ferreting. There is also record of ferrets being used to control rodent populations on ships during the American revolutionary war. (Schilling 2000)

## Ecosystem Roles

Because domestic ferrets do not inhabit natural ecosystems, they have no ecosystem roles.

### **Economic Importance for Humans: Positive**

Domestic ferrets are popular pets. There are ferret breeders and ferret farms that raise ferrets for the pet trade, and many pet shops carry ferrets to sell. There are many other products that go along with a pet ferret including ferret food, ferret toys, ferret cages, ferret beds, and other commercial items designed specifically for ferrets. Ferrets have also been used in research. (Schilling, 2000)

⋮ **Positive Impacts:** pet trade ; research and education

### **Economic Importance for Humans: Negative**

Domestic ferrets, if not properly vaccinated or cared for, can harbor certain diseases that are transmissible to humans. Domestic ferrets have formed feral populations in some parts of the world and can be a serious pest of native birds and other wildlife.

⋮ **Negative Impacts:** injures humans ( carries human disease ) ;  
 ⋮ causes or carries domestic animal disease

### **Conservation Status**

Domestic ferrets are not listed on any conservation lists, because their populations are far from low. On the other hand, domestic ferrets have been used in efforts to build the populations of endangered species such as the black-footed ferret. Scientists have recently successfully completed a non-surgical embryo collection and transfer in domestic ferrets. This means that they took the embryo from one female and transferred it to another female with out using surgical procedures. This procedure resulted in live young with the domestic ferrets. This is significant because it can be modified to be used in black-footed ferrets. (Segelken 1996)

#### **IUCN Red List**

No special status

#### **US Migratory Bird**

**Act**

No special status

#### **US Federal List**

No special status

### **CITES**

No special status

## Other Comments

Ferrets were likely domesticated from European polecats (*M. putorius furo*) over 2000 years ago. At this time it is likely that captive and wild ferrets/polecats continued to interbreed. Learn more about the wild relatives of domestic ferrets in our ADW account for *Mustela putorius* at: [http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/mustela/m.\\_putorius\\$narrative.html](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/mustela/m._putorius$narrative.html) .

## Contributors

Jessica Duda (author), University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point,  
Chris Yahnke (editor), University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

## References

Animal Diversity Web: *Mustela putorius* [European polecat] [http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/mustela/m.\\_putorius.html](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/mustela/m._putorius.html) September 2, 2002

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The ADW Team gratefully acknowledges their support.



## References

## External links

# Etymology

The name "ferret" is derived from the Latin *furittus*, meaning "little thief", a likely reference to the common ferret penchant for secreting away small items.<sup>[4]</sup> The Greek word *ictis* occurs in a play written by Aristophanes, *The Acharnians*, in 425 BC. Whether this was a reference to ferrets, polecats, or the similar Egyptian mongoose is uncertain.<sup>[5]</sup>

A male ferret is called a hob; a female ferret is a jill. A spayed female is a sprite, a neutered male is a gib, and a vasectomised male is known as a hoblet. Ferrets under one year old are known as kits. A group of ferrets is known as a "business",<sup>[6]</sup> or historically as a "busyness". Other purported collective nouns, including "besyness", "fesynes", "fesnyng", and "feamyng", appear in some dictionaries, but are almost certainly ghost words.<sup>[7]</sup>

# Biology

## Characteristics

Ferrets have a typical mustelid body-shape, being long and slender. Their average length is about 50 cm (20 in) including a 13 cm (5.1 in) tail. Their pelage has various colorations including brown, black, white or mixed. They weigh between 0.7 and 2.0 kg (1.5 and 4.4 lb) and are sexually dimorphic as the males are substantially larger than females. The average gestation period is 42 days and females may have two or three litters each year. The litter size is usually between three and seven kits which are weaned after three to six weeks and become independent at three months. They become sexually mature at approximately six months and the average life span is seven to 10 years.<sup>[8][9]</sup> Ferrets are induced ovulators.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Behavior

Ferrets spend 14–18 hours a day asleep and are most active around the hours of dawn and dusk, meaning they are crepuscular.<sup>[11]</sup> Unlike their polecat ancestors, which are solitary animals, most ferrets will live happily in social groups. A group of ferrets is commonly referred to as a "business".<sup>[12]</sup> They are territorial, like to burrow, and prefer to sleep in an enclosed area.<sup>[13]</sup>

Like many other mustelids, ferrets have scent glands near their anus, the secretions from which are used in scent marking. Ferrets can recognize individuals from these anal gland secretions, as well as the sex of unfamiliar individuals.<sup>[14]</sup> Ferrets may also use urine marking for sex and individual recognition.<sup>[15]</sup>

As with skunks, ferrets can release their anal gland secretions when startled or scared, but the smell is much less potent and dissipates rapidly. Most pet ferrets in the US are sold descented (anal glands removed).<sup>[16]</sup> In many other parts of the world, including the UK and other European countries, de-scenting is considered an unnecessary mutilation.



Skull of a ferret



Ferret profile

If excited, they may perform a behavior called the "weasel war dance", characterized by frenzied sideways hops, leaps and bumping into nearby objects. Despite its common name, it is not aggressive but is a joyful invitation to play. It is often accompanied by a unique soft clucking noise, commonly referred to as "dooking".<sup>[17]</sup> When scared, ferrets will hiss; when upset, they squeak softly.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Diet

Ferrets are obligate carnivores.<sup>[19]</sup> The natural diet of their wild ancestors consisted of whole small prey, including meat, organs, bones, skin, feathers, and fur.<sup>[20]</sup> Ferrets have short digestive systems and quick metabolism, so they need to eat frequently. Prepared dry foods consisting almost entirely of meat (including high-grade cat food, although specialized ferret food is increasingly available and preferable)<sup>[21]</sup> provide the most nutritional value and are the most convenient,<sup>[22]</sup> though some ferret owners feed pre-killed or live prey (such as mice and rabbits) to their ferrets to more closely mimic their natural diet.<sup>[23][24]</sup> Ferret digestive tracts lack a cecum and the animal is largely unable to digest plant matter.<sup>[25]</sup> Before much was known about ferret physiology, many breeders and pet stores recommended food like fruit in the ferret diet, but it is now known that such foods are inappropriate, and may in fact have negative ramifications on ferret health. Ferrets imprint on their food at around six months old. This can make introducing new foods to an older ferret a challenge, and even simply changing brands of kibble may meet with resistance from a ferret that has never eaten the food as a kit. It is therefore advisable to expose young ferrets to as many different types and flavors of appropriate food as possible.<sup>[26]</sup>

## Dentition

Ferrets have four types of teeth (the number includes maxillary (upper) and mandibular (lower) teeth) with a dental formula of  $\frac{3.1.4.1}{3.1.4.2}$ :

- Twelve small incisor teeth (only 2–3 mm [ $\frac{3}{32}$ – $\frac{1}{8}$  in] long) located between the canines in the front of the mouth. These are used for grooming.
- Four canines used for killing prey.
- Twelve premolar teeth that the ferret uses to chew food—located at the sides of the mouth, directly behind the canines. The ferret uses these teeth to cut through flesh, using them in a scissors action to cut the meat into digestible chunks.
- Six molars (two on top and four on the bottom) at the far back of the mouth are used to crush food.



Ferret dentition

## Health

Ferrets are known to suffer from several distinct health problems. Among the most common are cancers affecting the adrenal glands, pancreas, and lymphatic system. Viral diseases include canine distemper and influenza. Health problems can occur in unspayed females when not being used for breeding.<sup>[27]</sup> Certain health problems have also been linked to ferrets being neutered before reaching sexual maturity. Certain colors of ferret may also carry a genetic defect known as Waardenburg syndrome. Similar to domestic cats, ferrets can also suffer from hairballs and dental problems. Ferrets will also often chew on and swallow foreign objects which can lead to bowel obstruction.<sup>[28]</sup>



Male ferret

# History of domestication

In common with most domestic animals, the original reason for ferrets being domesticated by human beings is uncertain, but it may have involved hunting. According to phylogenetic studies, the ferret was domesticated from the European polecat (*Mustela putorius*), and likely descends from a North African lineage of the species.<sup>[29]</sup> Analysis of mitochondrial DNA suggests that ferrets were domesticated around 2,500 years ago. It has been claimed that the ancient Egyptians were the first to domesticate ferrets, but as no mummified remains of a ferret have yet been found, nor any hieroglyph of a ferret, and no polecat now occurs wild in the area, that idea seems unlikely.<sup>[30]</sup>

Ferrets were probably used by the Romans for hunting.<sup>[31][32]</sup>

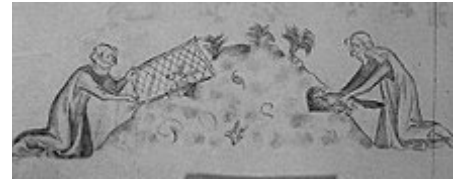
Colonies of feral ferrets have established themselves in areas where there is no competition from similarly sized predators, such as in the Shetland Islands and in remote regions in New Zealand. Where ferrets coexist with polecats, hybridization is common. It has been claimed that New Zealand has the world's largest feral population of ferret-polecat hybrids.<sup>[33]</sup> In 1877, farmers in New Zealand demanded that ferrets be introduced into the country to control the rabbit population, which was also introduced by humans. Five ferrets were imported in 1879, and in 1882–1883, 32 shipments of ferrets were made from London, totaling 1,217 animals. Only 678 landed, and 198 were sent from Melbourne, Australia. On the voyage, the ferrets were mated with the European polecat, creating a number of hybrids that were capable of surviving in the wild. In 1884 and 1886, close to 4,000 ferrets and ferret hybrids, 3,099 weasels and 137 stoats were turned loose.<sup>[34]</sup> Concern was raised that these animals would eventually prey on indigenous wildlife once rabbit populations dropped, and this is exactly what happened to New Zealand's bird species which previously had had no mammalian predators.

## Ferreting

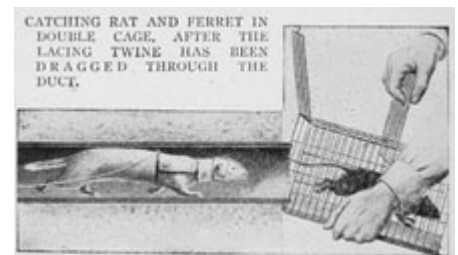
For millennia, the main use of ferrets was for hunting, or *ferreting*. With their long, lean build, and inquisitive nature, ferrets are very well equipped for getting down holes and chasing rodents, rabbits and moles out of their burrows. Caesar Augustus sent ferrets or mongooses (named *viverrae* by Plinius) to the Balearic Islands to control the rabbit plagues in 6 BC.<sup>[35][36]</sup> In England, in 1390, a law was enacted restricting the use of ferrets for hunting to the relatively wealthy:

it is ordained that no manner of layman which hath not lands to the value of forty shillings a year shall from henceforth keep any greyhound or other dog to hunt, nor shall he use ferrets, nets, heys, harepipes nor cords, nor other engines for to take or destroy deer, hares, nor conies, nor other gentlemen's game, under pain of twelve months' imprisonment.<sup>[37]</sup>

Ferrets were first introduced into the New World in the 17th century, and were used extensively from 1860 until the start of World War II to protect grain stores in the American West from rodents. They are still used for hunting in some countries, including the United Kingdom, where rabbits are considered a plague species by farmers.<sup>[38]</sup> The practice is illegal in several countries where it is feared that ferrets could unbalance the ecology. In 2009 in Finland, where ferreting



Women hunting rabbits with a ferret in the Queen Mary Psalter



Muzzled ferret flushing a rat, as illustrated in Harding's *Ferret Facts and Fancies* (1915)

was previously unknown, the city of Helsinki began to use ferrets to restrict the city's rabbit population to a manageable level. Ferreting was chosen because in populated areas it is considered to be safer and less ecologically damaging than shooting the rabbits.

## As pets

In the United States, ferrets were relatively rare pets until the 1980s. A government study by the California State Bird and Mammal Conservation Program estimated that by 1996 about 800,000 domestic ferrets were being kept as pets in the United States.<sup>[39]</sup>

Like many household pets, ferrets require a cage. For ferrets, a wire cage at least 18 inches long and deep and 30 inches wide or longer is needed. Ferrets cannot be housed in environments such as an aquarium because of the poor ventilation.<sup>[40]</sup> It is preferable that the cage have more than one level but this is not crucial. Usually two to three different shelves are used.



A ferret in a war dance jump.

## Regulation

- **Australia:** It is illegal to keep ferrets as pets in **Queensland** or the **Northern Territory**; in the **Australian Capital Territory** a licence is required.
- **Brazil:** They are allowed only if they are given a microchip identification tag and sterilized.
- **New Zealand:** It has been illegal to sell, distribute or breed ferrets in New Zealand since 2002 unless certain conditions are met.<sup>[41]</sup>
- **United States:** Ferrets were once banned in many US states, but most of these laws were rescinded in the 1980s and 1990s as they became popular pets.
  - Ferrets are still illegal in **California** under Fish and Game Code Section 2118;<sup>[42]</sup> and the California Code of Regulations,<sup>[43]</sup> although it is not illegal for veterinarians in the state to treat ferrets kept as pets.
  - Additionally, "Ferrets are strictly prohibited as pets under **Hawaii** law because they are potential carriers of the rabies virus";<sup>[44]</sup> the territory of **Puerto Rico** has a similar law.<sup>[45]</sup>
  - Ferrets are restricted by individual cities, such as **Washington, D.C.**, and **New York City**,<sup>[45]</sup> which renewed its ban in 2015.<sup>[46][47]</sup> They are also prohibited on many military bases.<sup>[45]</sup> A permit to own a ferret is needed in other areas, including Rhode Island.<sup>[48]</sup> Illinois and Georgia do not require a permit to merely possess a ferret, but a permit is required to breed ferrets.<sup>[49][50]</sup> It was once illegal to own ferrets in Dallas, Texas,<sup>[51]</sup> but the current Dallas City Code for Animals includes regulations for the vaccination of ferrets.<sup>[52]</sup> Pet ferrets are legal in Wisconsin, however legality varies by municipality. The city of **Oshkosh**, for example, classifies ferrets as a wild animal and subsequently prohibits them from being kept within the city limits. Also, an import permit from the state department of agriculture is required to bring one into the state.<sup>[53]</sup> Under common law, ferrets are deemed "wild animals" subject to strict liability for injuries they cause, but in several states statutory law has overruled the common law, deeming ferrets "domestic".<sup>[54]</sup>
- **Japan:** In **Hokkaido** prefecture, ferrets must be registered with the local government.<sup>[55]</sup> In other prefectures, no restrictions apply.

## Other uses

Ferrets are an important experimental animal model for human influenza,<sup>[56][57]</sup> and have been used to study the 2009 H1N1 (swine flu) virus.<sup>[58]</sup> Smith, Andrews, Laidlaw (1933) inoculated ferrets intra-nasally with human naso-pharyngeal washes, which produced a form of influenza that spread to other cage mates. The human influenza virus (Influenza type A) was transmitted from an infected ferret to a junior investigator, from whom it was subsequently re-isolated.

- Ferrets have been used in many broad areas of research, such as the study of pathogenesis and treatment in a variety of human disease, these including studies into cardiovascular disease, nutrition, respiratory diseases such as SARS and human influenza, airway physiology,<sup>[59]</sup> cystic fibrosis and gastrointestinal disease.
- Because they share many anatomical and physiological features with humans, ferrets are extensively used as experimental subjects in biomedical research, in fields such as virology, reproductive physiology, anatomy, endocrinology, and neuroscience.<sup>[60]</sup>
- In the UK, ferret racing is often a feature of rural fairs or festivals, with people placing small bets on ferrets that run set routes through pipes and wire mesh. Although financial bets are placed, the event is primarily for entertainment purposes as opposed to 'serious' betting sports such as horse or greyhound racing.<sup>[61][62]</sup>

## Terminology and coloring

Most ferrets are either albinos, with white fur and pink eyes, or display the typical dark masked sable coloration of their wild polecat ancestors. In recent years fancy breeders have produced a wide variety of colors and patterns. Color refers to the color of the ferret's guard hairs, undercoat, eyes, and nose; pattern refers to the concentration and distribution of color on the body, mask, and nose, as well as white markings on the head or feet when present. Some national organizations, such as the American Ferret Association, have attempted to classify these variations in their showing standards.<sup>[63]</sup>

There are four basic colors. The sable (including chocolate and dark brown), albino, dark eyed white (DEW) (also known as black eyed white or BEW), and the silver. All the other colors of a ferret are variations on one of these four categories.

### Waardenburg-like coloring

Ferrets with a white stripe on their face or a fully white head, primarily blazes, badgers, and pandas, almost certainly carry a congenital defect which shares some similarities to Waardenburg syndrome. This causes, among other things, a cranial deformation in the womb which broadens the skull, white face markings, and also partial or total deafness. It is estimated as many as 75 percent of ferrets with these Waardenburg-like colorings are deaf.

White ferrets were favored in the Middle Ages for the ease in seeing them in thick undergrowth. Leonardo da Vinci's painting *Lady with an Ermine* is likely mislabelled; the animal is probably a ferret, not a stoat, (for which "ermine" is an alternative name for the animal in its white winter coat). Similarly, the ermine portrait of Queen Elizabeth the First shows her with her pet ferret, which has been decorated with painted-on heraldic ermine spots.

"The Ferreter's Tapestry" is a 15th-century tapestry from Burgundy, France, now part of the Burrell Collection housed in the Glasgow Museum and Art Galleries. It shows a group of peasants hunting rabbits with nets and white ferrets. This image was reproduced in *Renaissance Dress in Italy 1400–1500*, by Jacqueline Herald, Bell & Hyman.<sup>[a]</sup>

*Gaston Phoebus' Book of the Hunt* was written in approximately 1389 to explain how to hunt different kinds of animals, including how to use ferrets to hunt rabbits. Illustrations show how multicolored ferrets that were fitted with muzzles were used to chase rabbits out of their warrens and into waiting nets.



Typical ferret coloration, known as a sable or polecat-colored ferret



White or albino ferret

# Import restrictions

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- **Australia** – Ferrets cannot be imported into Australia. A report drafted in August 2000 seems to be the only effort made to date to change the situation.<sup>[64]</sup>
- **Canada** – Ferrets brought from anywhere except the US require a Permit to Import from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency Animal Health Office. Ferrets from the US require only a vaccination certificate signed by a veterinarian. Ferrets under three months old are not subject to any import restrictions.<sup>[65]</sup>
- **European Union** – As of July 2004, dogs, cats, and ferrets can travel freely within the European Union under the pet passport scheme. To cross a border within the EU, ferrets require at minimum an EU PETS passport and an identification microchip (though some countries will accept a tattoo instead). Vaccinations are required; most countries require a rabies vaccine, and some require a distemper vaccine and treatment for ticks and fleas 24 to 48 hours before entry. Ferrets occasionally need to be quarantined before entering the country. PETS travel information is available from any EU veterinarian or on government websites.
- **United Kingdom** – The UK accepts ferrets under the EU's PETS travel scheme. Ferrets must be microchipped, vaccinated against rabies, and documented. They must be treated for ticks and tapeworms 24 to 48 hours before entry. They must also arrive via an authorized route. Ferrets arriving from outside the EU may be subject to a six-month quarantine.<sup>[66]</sup>

## See also

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- Ferret-legging
- Sredni Vashtar

## Notes

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- a. ISBN 0-391-02362-4

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- Movies with ferrets in them as a character (<https://fluffyplanet.com/movies-with-ferrets-in-them/>)
- View the *musFur1* (<https://genome.ucsc.edu/cgi-bin/hgTracks?db=musFur1>) genome assembly in the UCSC Genome Browser.

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## Facts on Ferrets

The ferret is a domesticated animal whose ancestors are believed to be native European polecats (*Mustela putorius*). Inquisitive, smart, and playful, ferrets have become popular companion animals, but they require a special diet and care.<sup>1</sup> Often, after the novelty of an impulse purchase wears off, ferrets are abandoned to certain death in the wild or to severely crowded animal shelters.

### Adoption

If you're willing to open your home to a ferret, first make sure that you don't live in an area that prohibits it: California and Hawaii both ban keeping ferrets as companion animals, and some local communities, such as New York City, also either restrict or ban the keeping of ferrets in homes.<sup>2,3</sup> Ask your local wildlife department, fish and game department, humane society, or veterinarian about the legality of keeping a ferret where you live and whether you will need to obtain a permit if you adopt one.

Please adopt from an animal shelter or rescue group. Search the Internet or ask your local humane society for a group near you. Never buy ferrets—or any other animal—from pet stores, which sell ferrets raised in disease-ridden, factory farm–like conditions. Please read our factsheet “Pet Shops: No Bargain for Animals (<https://www.peta.org/issues/companion-animals-5/pet-shops-bargain-animals/>)” for more information.

Ferrets can usually coexist peacefully and even amicably with cats and dogs. However ferrets should not be allowed free access to smaller pets such as birds or rodents. Supervision is a must, for the safety of the ferret and other animals. If you have young children, be sure to monitor their interaction with the ferret as closely as you would with a dog. Ferrets can and will bite in self-defense.

### Ferret-Proofing

Maintaining a ferret-proof home is essential for the animal's safety and well-being.

Exercise caution, especially with the following tempting but potentially dangerous items in your home:

- Cabinets and drawers (Ferrets can open them.)
- Heaters (Ferrets might knock them over.)
- Furnace ducts (Ferrets can get inside them.)
- Recliners and sofa beds (Ferrets have been crushed in their levers and springs.)
- Anything spongy or springy, such as kitchen sponges, erasers, shoe insoles, foam earplugs, Silly Putty, foam rubber (including inside a cushion or mattress), Styrofoam, insulation, and rubber door stoppers (Swallowing pieces of these items will often result in an intestinal blockage.)

- Filled bathtubs, toilets, and water and paint buckets (Ferrets can drown in them.)
- Plastic bags (Ferrets can suffocate in them.)
- Holes behind refrigerators and other appliances with exposed wires, fans, and insulation (Ferrets love to chew on wires and eat insulation.)
- Dishwashers, refrigerators, washers and dryers (Ferrets can get trapped inside them.)
- Houseplants (Some are poisonous.)
- Box springs (Ferrets love to rip the cloth covering the underside of box springs and climb inside, where they may become trapped or crushed. To prevent this, attach wire mesh or a thin piece of wood to the underside of the box springs.)

## **Housing**

Even if you plan to give your ferret the run of the house, it's best when you're not home to enclose him or her in a ferret-proof room or in a roomy, metal mesh cage—one that is at the very least 24 inches long, 24 inches deep, and 18 inches high, although larger enclosures are certainly preferable. If you have two or more ferrets living together, you will need a much larger cage and preferably multiple levels and sleeping areas. Whatever you decide, your ferret will appreciate ramps, tunnels made from dryer hose or black drainage pipe, a “bedroom” made out of an upside-down box with a cut-out doorway, and hammocks made from old jeans or shirts. Line the cage bottom with linoleum squares or cloth cage pads, and use old T-shirts and sweatshirts for bedding—never use cedar or pine shavings, which are toxic to small animals.

Don't let the temperature in their living quarters climb too high, and monitor the humidity. In the winter, when the heat is on and humidity can get too low, ferrets' skin can get dry and itchy, so use a humidifier. And if the humidity is allowed to get too high during the hot summer and the temperature rises above 85 degrees, ferrets can succumb to heatstroke. Keep in mind that ferrets' wild cousins live in underground burrows where the temperature is 55 degrees with 50 percent humidity.<sup>4</sup>

## **Litter Training**

Ferrets can easily be trained to use a litterbox. They tend to choose their own toilet area in a corner, so start by putting a litterbox with paper pulp litter (NEVER clay or clumping litter) in that area. Gradually move the litterbox closer and closer to the area that you would like it to be in. Ferrets do love corners for their bathroom areas, so if you can put the litterbox in a corner, you will likely have greater success.

## **Diet**

Ferrets are predators and strict carnivores and therefore require highly digestible, meat-based proteins. They cannot survive on vegetarian diets or most dog foods, as there is too much vegetable matter in those products, and too much carbohydrate in the diet can create health problems in ferrets.

If feeding dry kibble, be sure that the food contains at least 30 to 40 percent crude protein (of animal origin) and 15 to 20 percent fat. A thorough reading of the label is crucial—the first three ingredients should be meat-based.<sup>5</sup> Avoid processed treats marketed for ferrets, as they tend to be carbohydrate- or grain-based. Supplements should not be necessary if the optimal diet is being fed. For more details, please read “The Ferret Diet (<https://beta.vin.com/doc/?id=4951366&pid=17256>)” by Dr. Susan Brown.

## Keeping Your Ferret Healthy

Ferrets require routine veterinary visits, just as dogs and cats do. If you live in an area that requires rabies shots for dogs and cats, then your ferret will need one too. Ferrets can also get heartworms, fleas, and canine distemper. Please consult your veterinarian about preventive measures. Do NOT use dips, sprays, or collars to combat fleas.

At 4 months, ferrets can be spayed or neutered. This procedure is necessary not only to prevent reproduction but also for the well-being of your animal companion. Neutering greatly decreases a male's body and urine odor once he matures and prevents him from urine-marking his territory in your home. Spaying also reduces a female's scent and prevents her from dying of severe anemia, which can develop in intact females who go into heat but do not breed.<sup>6</sup>

Ferrets kept mostly indoors will likely need nail-trimming every six to eight weeks. A veterinarian can show you the proper way to trim nails.

Exercise is important! You can simulate your ferret's need for burrowing and hunting with toys like large cardboard mailing tubes, dryer hoses, paper bags, PVC pipe, ping-pong balls, golf balls, and small cloth baby toys or feather cat toys that hang from springs. Please give your ferret time to play outside his or her cage for at least several hours every day.

## Resources

American Ferret Association (<http://www.ferret.org/index.html>)

Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians (<http://www.aemv.org/>)

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