

Taking Care of your Pet Ferret

Environment

Ferrets can be housed inside or outside in enclosures. These enclosures should be large enough to fit a litter box, a sleeping area with either a towel or blanket for bedding and a large play area so they can exercise. Ferrets that are housed outside will also need an area that is shaded so that when the sun is at its peak they can stay cool, because ferrets can suffer from heat exhaustion. Make sure that whatever type of enclosure you choose to house your pet in is "escape proof". Ferrets are curious animals and like to explore and they also like to burrow so if they are let out make sure they are well supervised because they may not return if unfound. Using a small cat harness and leash helps with supervising your pet when they are out of their enclosure.

Ferrets are generally pretty clean and will choose one corner of their enclosure to relieve themselves. Placing a litter box in this corner will help make cleaning up after them easier.

Diet

A ferret's diet should consist of meat and some fruits and vegetables. Most ferret owners will feed dry cat food, but ferrets have a shorter digestion tract than cats so they may not get as much nutrients from this food. Supplementing the food with vitamin drops or raw liver, egg yolks, milk, bread, and some wholesome table scraps can help keep your ferret happy and healthy. You can also buy commercially prepared ferret or mink chow. Water should be provided at all times, and since ferrets are always on the move a ball-type water bottle (i.e. the kind you would give a rabbit or hamster) works best so that they don't tip the bowl of water over while playing.

Medical Considerations and Elective Surgeries

Spaying and Neutering

Most ferrets are already spayed and neutered when purchased through a pet store. Neutering and spaying can be done between the ages 6-8 weeks in ferrets. The sooner it is done the better. Neutering a male will help make him calmer and

friendlier. However, if you do happen to purchase an intact female here is something you might want to know before keeping them that way: Female ferrets will stay in heat until they are bred. Due to the ever increasing estrogen levels in the blood, the female will start having bone marrow depressions, since blood cells are made in the bone marrow this will cause an anemia and eventually cause death, this is called Aplastic Anemia. It is HIGHLY recommended, if you are not going to breed and raise ferrets, that you should spay your female.

Both males and females are equipped with scent glands that are known as musk glands. These work much in the same way as a skunks scent glands. When the ferret becomes fearful it will spray the contents of this gland, omitting a Musky odor that can be pretty overpowering. These glands are generally removed from the ferret at the same time they are neutered.

Insulinoma (Pancreatic tumor)

Insulinoma is the opposite of diabetes, instead of not having enough insulin in the body the Pancreas creates too much. When this happens the blood sugar drops dramatically below normal. Symptoms include little to no energy and a decrease in appetite. In some cases convulsions will be seen as well. If any of these symptoms occur call you vet and have you ferret seen. Most of the time surgery to remove the tumor can be done.

Hair Loss

Normal, healthy ferrets will shed just like any other pet, however, if they lose hair in large quantities to the point that they are bald in spots there can be an underlying issue at hand. At the moment the reasoning for this anomaly is undetermined. Consult a vet to make sure there are no external parasites, nutritional and or hormonal deficiencies is the best way to go.

Humane Influenza

Ferrets can get several strains of influenza virus. Ferrets can get the flu from humans. Symptoms are listlessness, loss of appetite, a fever, discharge from the nose, and sneezing. These symptoms are usually self-limiting and rarely causes death. If you are sick with the flu it is a good idea to stay away from you ferret for a while or at least not play with it.

Foreign Body Ingestion

Because Ferrets are naturally curious they are always getting into some sort of trouble when outside of the cage. Ingesting foreign bodies can cause acute or

intermittent problems like vomiting, loss of appetite or slowed to no bowel movement

Vaccinations

Ferrets can get canine Distemper and so they should be vaccinated to help protect them. Rabies should be done regularly. Ferrets should get a yearly exam just to keep up a good relationship with your vet and to make sure there is nothing wrong with you pet.