



**P & K Pets  
Info Sheet #04**

19 Magill Rd  
Stepney  
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# FERRET CARE



INFORMATION



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### **INTRODUCTION**

Ferrets are carnivores. They belong to the weasel family and are related to the mink, otter and badger. They are a true domestic animal. Being dependent on man for their survival. They have been a domestic species, used mostly for hunting rabbits and small rodents, for several thousand years. Male ferrets are called HOBBS and females are called JILLS. Young ferrets are called KITS (or kittens), and a group of ferrets is called a BUSINESS (ie like a gaggle of geese or a pride of lions).

Ferrets make enjoyable entertaining pets but, like puppies, need training. Ferrets that have had insufficient handling and training can become quite aggressive; bites from ferrets can cause severe injury. Early handling is especially important if the ferret is to live in a household with children and other animals. Ferrets can be trained to use a litter tray quite easily, however, the ferrets generally determine the position of the tray.

Ferrets do enjoy toys and will play quite enthusiastically, most cat toys are suitable and they love play areas in which to ambush their owners or ferret companions.

### **BREEDING**

The breeding season for ferrets in SA, is from August to March. Both jills and hobs have a clearly defined breeding season, marked by the jill's vulva swelling up to about 12mm diameter (ordinarily less than 2mm in length) and the hobs testicles descend into the scrotum. Mating takes several hours and appears quite a violent affair to bystanders. After mating, the gestation time is 42 days, after which a litter of typically 6-10 young are born. They will be blind and deaf for about five weeks. Weaning takes place between 6 and 8 weeks.

Jills, which are not mated stand about a 50% chance of developing "prolonged oestrus disease", which is a fatal form of anaemia. It is sometimes called "fading syndrome", as she may take six weeks to gradually lose condition and die. It can be avoided easily by either breeding the animal normally, by having her spayed (ie de-sexed) or by mating her with a vasectomised hob. This method is



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now available in Australia. It only solves the problem for about eight weeks, after which she will require mating again at least once and perhaps twice before the next autumn, when she will remain anoestrus until the following spring.

### **FEEDING**

Ferrets should be fed with much the same foods as a cat or dog. They enjoy fresh meat, tinned cat food, dry cat food, fruit, egg and some vegetables. Commercial dry ferret foods are available. As with cats and dogs, care must be taken with excess fats, sugars and with sharp bones that may choke them. As a treat ferrets enjoy natural yoghurt, however, this is to be fed only occasionally.

### **HOUSING**

Housing for ferrets needs to be secure because if they escape they come to mischief quickly. Some are killed on the roads, most die of thirst or starvation and occasionally ferrets find their way into a chicken coop and do much damage. Ferrets should never be allowed too close to small children, as they will sometimes attack without provocation, and their teeth are very sharp. Although such incidents are rare, they can cause serious injury in these attacks.

Ferrets need a cage that is regularly cleaned, waterproof and keeps out the draughts. In summer it must be kept cool. A sleeping box is required with bedding material. Some owners use shredded newspaper, while others use old jumpers or clothing. Cage floor bedding can be newspaper, pelleted dust free newspaper or other low allergenic dust free substrates. S.A. Ferret Association members will gladly provide information about different cage types on request. Cages should give about a half to one square metre of floor space per ferret.

If you want more information on any aspect of ferret care, please ask somebody from SAFA. They conduct shows, ferret races, regular meetings and they also produce a small monthly newsletter. If you are interested in ferrets, why not consider joining and attending their meetings.

Information in this sheet is courtesy of the SA Ferret Association  
PO Box 56, Greenacres 5086