FERRET  

*Mustela putorious furo*

**Natural history**
The domestic ferret is probably derived from the European polecat (*M. putorious putorious*). Ferrets serve as working animals (in the age-old tradition of “ferreting”), pets, and laboratory animals. In the United States, ferrets are raised on ferret farms where they are spayed or neutered at 6 weeks of age. After each procedure, a tattoo is placed on the ear pinna. Male ferrets are called “hobs”, females are “jills”, and juveniles are “kits”.

**Taxonomy**
Class Mammalia  
Order Carnivora  
Family Mustelidae  
Mustelids include weasels, stoats, skunks, otters, and badgers.

**Colors**
The American Ferret Association recognizes 42 breeds. Ferrets come in a variety of colors with albino and sable or fitch being the two original ferret colors.

**Diet**
Feed a ferret food or high-quality cat food that contains animal-based protein. Avoid kitten food as this contains higher fat levels than is necessary. Crude protein should be 30-35% and fat content should be 15-20%.

**Husbandry**
Although technically nocturnal, ferrets easily adjust their schedule to human schedules. House ferrets in multi-level solid-bottom flooring. Provide toweling and other items for burrowing and hiding. Ferrets are also commonly litter pan trained.

**Normal physiologic values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>100-103°F (37.8-39.4°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulse</td>
<td>180-250 bpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiration</td>
<td>30-40 bpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean systolic blood pressure</td>
<td>133-161 mmHg (conscious)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean diastolic</td>
<td>110-125 mmHg (anesthetized)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body weight</td>
<td>600-2000 g (Males are larger. F:600-1000 g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life span</td>
<td>6-10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FERRET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual maturity</td>
<td>9-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestation</td>
<td>41-42 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litter size</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth weight</td>
<td>6-12 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teeth first erupt</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes open</td>
<td>32-34 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaning</td>
<td>6-8 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily water intake</td>
<td>75-100 ml</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target environmental temperature</td>
<td>65-70°F 39-64°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target relative humidity</td>
<td>40-65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Anatomy/physiology**

**Integumentary:**
Seasonal molts occur, especially in ferrets living outdoors, coats lighten during the summer and darken during the winter. Even when descented, sebaceous skin glands convey a musky odor. A lack of sweat glands makes ferrets vulnerable to heat stress.

**Gastrointestinal:**
Dental formula: I3/3  C1/1  PM3/3  M1/2
Short, simple digestive tract with no cecum or ileocolic valve.

**Musculoskeletal:**
The spine is very flexible
Vertebral formula: C7 T15 L5 (6 or 7) S3 Cd18
Ferrets have powerful jaw tone. Even debilitated ferrets generally require induction agents for intubation.

**Urogenital:**
Renal cysts are common incidental findings.
The male ferret possesses a J-shaped os penis.
Females are induced ovulators.

**Cardiovascular:**
The heart lies more caudal in the chest than in similarly sized dogs and cats.
A very narrow ventral space in the nasal conchae makes passing a nasogastric tube difficult.

**Respiratory:**
Blood types have not been identified in ferrets and cross-matching is not required.
Early neutering and a lack of natural photoperiod may predispose ferrets to adrenocortical disease.

**Hematopoietic:**
Annual examinations are recommended until ferrets are 3-4 years old, then biannual exams are recommended.

**Endocrine:**
Almost all pet ferrets in the United States are descented and neutered before they enter the market. As induced ovulators, all female ferrets should be spayed to prevent the risk of persistent estrus and potentially fatal anemia.

Vaccinate against rabies virus and canine distemper virus (CDV). Ferrets are exquisitely sensitive to CDV and should never be vaccinated with products intended for use in dogs. Vaccinated with products intended for use in dogs.
**FERRET**

Adrenocortical disease
Helicobacter gastritis

**Important medical conditions**

Human influenza virus
Insulinoma
Lymphoma

**Venipuncture**

Large volumes: jugular, cranial vena cava
Small volumes: lateral saphenous or cephalic veins

The ferret jugular vein is located more lateral than in a cat
There is thickened skin over the skin of the neck in hobs

**Restraint**

Ferrets are sweet-natured, gregarious animals that may be minimally restrained. Ferrets may be manually restrained
1. Scruff and stretch. Instead of holding the rear limbs as in a cat, grasp the pelvis in one hand.
2. Roll the ferret up in a thin towel to create a ferret burrito.

**References and further reading**


Quesenberry KE, Carpenter JW (eds). Ferrets, Rabbits, and Rodents: Clinical
Author: Christal Pollock, DVM, Dipl. ABVP-Avian; Lafeber Company veterinary consultant

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