



## **Ferret Husbandry Sheet**

Ferrets are entertaining and playful pets. On average, they live between 5 and 9 years of age. Most ferrets come from commercial ferret farms where they receive their first vaccine, spay/neuter, and de-scenting procedure. It is an option to continue to vaccinate ferrets throughout their lifetime, though we do not commonly perform these at the Animal Hospital of Verona and should be discussed ahead of time if desired.

### **General Care**

Ferrets are playful by nature and often nip for attention. A firm no, and ending the play are the best ways to handle this behavior. Do not encourage rough play biting. Ferrets do best in pairs or groups as they are social animals normally. They often do well playing with cats and dogs. Be sure to watch dogs (especially hunting breeds) to assure they are gentle with the ferret and not seeing it as a prey animal. Ferrets naturally kill rodents so they should never be allowed access to pet rodents. Pet rodents should be housed far from ferrets because the scent of the ferret is stressful to rodents. Ferrets can be sensitive to high temperatures and should be provided a fan and ice packs (or shallow swimming pool) to keep cool if temperatures are above 80 degrees.

### **Housing**

Ferrets should be housed in a multi-level ferret cage (Ferret nation is an example) with plastic trays on each level. Carefresh bedding or fleece blankets should pad each surface. Multiple corner litter pans should be provided with recycled pelleted newspaper (such as yesterday's news) or wheat litter. Ferrets need a burrowing/sleeping area such as a hammock, fleece cube or tunnel. They need a bathroom area and a food storage area. Ferrets frequently store and hide food so a plastic container for them to hide their food works well. They like to play in cardboard boxes, paper bags, and PVC pipe tubes. Ferret size plastic wheels are available to allow some in cage exercise – make sure that your ferret is not too cramped inside. Ferrets should be provided daily exercise outside of the cage. This can be in a ferret proof room where they can run free. Remove all electric cords, small places the ferret could get into (including furniture), and the ability to eat foreign objects. Ferrets love to play and chew toys but any toy that is latex or rubber or could be chewed into smaller pieces should not be allowed. Ferrets can get intestinal obstructions from foreign objects.

## **Feeding**

Ferrets require a high fat and protein diet and are exclusively carnivores. Carbohydrates and sugars are not recommended. Ferrets should be free fed mainly a balanced ferret food such as Zupreem ferret or Wysong ferret. They can be fed high quality kitten food, but ideally, they should be fed ferret food. Ferrets can also be fed treats such as Wysong dream treats, cooked eggs, cooked meat and whole insects (such as earthworms, crickets, or mealworms).

Ferrets should be provided a water bottle because they are likely to knock over a water bowl.

## **Cleaning**

Ferrets cages should be spot cleaned daily. Change out the litter pans and remove any leftover fresh food (1 hour after offering). Wash any soiled fleece blankets or hammocks. Weekly the entire cage needs to be wiped down with a dilute bleach solution, rinsed, and then dried. All cage furniture (PVC tubes, wheels, litter pans, food dishes, water bottles) should be scrubbed with dilute bleach solution. All fleece blankets and hammocks should be washed weekly.

Ferrets are able to share influenza with humans so if you are sick, take precaution not to share your virus with your ferret.

## **Enrichment**

Even though we do our best as pet owners to provide the best care possible, sometimes that is just not enough. Some pets need additional stimuli/enrichment in addition to the right food, water and housing. Below are some options to increase the value of your pet's day-to-day lives. There is an infinite amount of ways to enrich your pet's life. Use your imagination, but here are a few to start:

- Hide outs/tunnels: Ferrets naturally desire to burrow and nest and enjoy hide boxes and tunnels.
  - PVC piping can be used to create tunnels and cardboard boxes provide nice hiding opportunities.
  - Ferrets also like variety – try offering some hanging hammocks to change things up.
- Toys: Ferrets are very intelligent and typically enjoy new things. This can be as simple as rolled up paper or cardboard or even bird toys to destroy or carry around.
  - Large bird toys can be the perfect toy and are typically more durable than other similar toys. Make sure to watch for small pieces or things your pet may be able to ingest.
    - Some bird toys offer foraging opportunities as well
- Climbing/Exploration: Ferrets love to run, jump and climb. Consider ropes, ladders, cargo nets, hanging beds and shelving to enhance their space.
- Chewing: Offer safe toys / chews for your ferret to chew. Many commercial treat options available.
- Scents: Being carnivores, they are driven by scent. Try incorporating edible extracts in different situations
  - Try placing on a cat tree to encourage climbing

- Digging pits: Ferrets love to burrow and play! Try ball pit, snow, dry rice, fresh untreated soil
- Foraging: Hiding high value treats (such as fruit) in something to make your pet work a little for their food is beneficial.
  - Try fishing for food out of water, digging in substrate or just hiding food items for your pet to search out.
  - Placing fruit snacks or peas into a shallow dish of water will entice your ferret to go diving.

Just make sure if making anything at home to avoid sticky tape, sharp edges, and chemicals. Be careful about disease transfer using anything from outside or another animal. Keep in mind that your pet can and will eat things they are not supposed to – monitor closely.