Ferret 101



Ferret Characteristics

* 3rd most popular pet in America
* Domesticated from the European Pole Cat
* Member of the weasel family
* Considered an obligate carnivore
* Possesses a distinct musk odor
* Famous for their “war dance”
* Notorious thieves and hoarders

Ferret Basics

* Lifespan 5 to 8 years
* Weight 1.5 lb to 6 lb (depending on gender)
* Body temperature 100°F to 103°F
* Heart rate 180-250 beats per minute
* Respiratory rate 33-36 breaths per minute
* Sexually mature at 5 to 6 months of age
* Gestation period of 42 days
* Adult teeth appear at 47 days
* Choppers are full size at 70 days!



More Ferret Facts

* Intact females are “jills” and intact males are “hobs”
* Spayed females are called “sprites”
* Neutered males are called “gibs”
* Baby ferrets are called “kits”
* Female ferrets are induced ovulators
* Non-mated females in heat may die from estrogen-induced anemia
* Heat intolerant
* Very high metabolism- sleep up to 18 hours a day
* Naturally very itchy
* Very intelligent and explore constantly
* Like to defecate in corners (latrine users)

Common Ferret Diseases

* Adrenal disease (adrenal gland tumor)

- Fur loss

- Weight loss

- Increased thirst

- Can treat with surgery or chemotherapy

* Insulinoma (cancer of the pancreas)

- Sudden loss of energy

- May appear intoxicated

- Blood glucose is suddenly low

- No cure, but can treat with steroids

- Steroids help release stored sugars

* Lymphoma (cancer of the white blood cells)

- Often no symptoms

- Lack of appetite and weight loss

- General lack of energy

- Treat with surgery or chemotherapy

Other Ferret Diseases

Epizootic Catarrhal Enteritis (ECE)

- Caused by a coronavirus shed in feces of carriers

- Destroys intestinal cells much like canine parvovirus

- Ferrets die of dehydration and malnutrition

Aleutian Disease (ferret parvovirus)

- Chronic wasting disease spread in body fluids

- Test blood of new ferrets and isolate

Canine Distemper

- Very contagious airborne virus

- Causes mucoid eye discharge, fever and death

- Vaccinate kits at 8, 11 and 14 weeks

- Vaccinate adults annually

Rabies

- Contagious zoonotic virus spread through saliva

 - Vaccinate kits at 12 weeks, then annually as adults\*

Handling Ferrets

* Grasp by scruff initially to avoid bite
* Position one hand under the shoulders with a thumb under the jaw
* If neck is too thick, then holding by scruff is ok
* Position other hand to support the hindquarters

