FERRET CARE/ FACTS

FERRET FACTS:

- Ferrets are carnivores (meat eaters). They are not related to the rodent family. They have a life span of around 10-12 years, however, they are considered to be seniors after 5 years of age.

- Male ferrets are called Hobs and females Jill’s

- The males usually weigh around 1-2 kg and the females 500 to 900 grams.

- They are sexually mature around 4-8 months of age and the gestation period is 41 to 43 days. Their litter size can be anywhere between 1 and 18.

- NOTE: Ferrets are very susceptible to getting the human flu or cold virus, so do not handle them when you are unwell.

YOUNG FERRETS:

- Young ferrets are called kits, and their ears and eyes open at 30-35 days. You should wean ferrets at 6-8 weeks.

- It is important that you handle ferrets from 4 weeks to encourage docility and to train them out of biting. Ferrets can also be toilet trained.

- They may require several trays throughout the household as they will go to the toilet often because ferrets have a very short digestive system and may not make it from one end of the house to the other.

- Ferrets can grow up with other animals in the household.

DIETRY REQUIREMENTS:

- Since ferrets are carnivores, they need 30-40% minimum protein in their diet.

- You can feed them red and white meat but NOT FISH.

- Their fat content needs to be at least 15-20% as this is their major energy source.
• Ferrets do NOT digest fibre from plant protein, carbohydrates or dairy products.

• They do need to eat frequently as food passes from their stomach to rectum in only 4 hrs.

• Ferrets also need to be exposed to all food types from an early age (by 4 months) as their dietary preferences set and they are extremely hard to change.

• Feeding a natural diet is best like raw rabbits and chicken carcasses including the stomach contents for adequate nutrition.

FOOD ALTERNATIVES:

• Close to ideal products are: Hills Feline growth, Iams kitten and Waltham’s Royal Canin feline growth.

HOUSING:

• Ferrets cages or the area where they should be kept needs to be around 15-20 degrees Celsius. Any temperature above 30 degrees can be fatal to a ferret as they cannot sweat.

• Can be kept in cages, or access to roam in the house (must be ferret proof)

• If kept in a cage, they must be allowed out to exercise at least 1 hr per day.

• The cage must be large enough to allow a sleeping area, eating area, and a litter tray.

• The litter tray should have 3 high sides and 1 low side, so the ferret can get in easily and back up to a corner to urinate or defecate.

• Use rabbit/guinea pig sipper bottles and food bowls must be heavy to prevent them from tipping over or attached so that the ferret cannot remove them.

• Never use foam or rubber in their housing as it can cause obstructions in their gastrointestinal tract and prove fatal if swallowed.

• Outside runs must have an underground bolt hole to escape from the summer heat.

• Environmental enrichment is very important for ferrets well being. Place boxes, PVC pipes, bags, tunnels, tubing etc into their housing for them to play in.
PREVENTATIVE VETERINARY CARE OF THE FERRET

VACCINATION PROGRAM:

- Vaccinate at 8 and 12 weeks against Canine Distemper then annually. If the first dose is given later than 12 weeks of age they will need a booster around 4-6 weeks later.

DESEXING:

- At 4-6 months of age
- Must desex males and females
- Desexing decreases the musky smell of ferrets, (removal of the anal glands in ferrets does not reduce the smell)
- In Australia the females come into season from August/September through to April. Once in season, they usually stay in season and after 4 weeks they will begin to develop anemia as their bone marrow is suppressed and death will occur if in season for 8 weeks continually.

WORMING:

- Tapeworm is a major problem. Use products like Felex paste 1ml/kg, revolution (kitten), or Advocate

HEARTWORM PREVENTION:

- Ferrets are very susceptible to heartworm infestation and must go onto a preventative program. All heartworm preventions are “off label” (not registered for use on ferrets but do work) i.e. Heartgard blue, Heartgard FX for kittens, Revolution (puppy/kitten) and Advocate.

FLEAS AND MITES:

- Ferrets are susceptible to fleas. Products to use are Frontline Spray, Advantage (cats/kittens), Revolution (kitten), Advocate, Program ampoules monthly in the food for egg control (these products are off label use)
- It is also important that you not only treat your ferret for fleas, but you must treat their environment as well with flea foggers/bombs. If the ferrets are inside pets you will need to treat inside the house as floorboards and carpets are ideal for fleas and eggs to live in.
- Flea eggs can survive months in the backyard and hatch when they feel vibrations from moving objects. Once the flea has had a blood meal from the ferret, they lay their eggs continuing the flea cycle.