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About the Author

Alyson Baxter wrote this ebook to encourage more people to learn about the joy which a ferret might bring to their lives.

Alyson said, "I want to match people with the right sort of ferret and help them start off their life together the right way."

"My book will help anyone who wants a ferret to understand the special appeal of these pets and the important points about ensuring that their new fuzzy friend will fit in with their lifestyle, family and other pets."

"I really like ferrets, but I cover the pros and cons of owning ferrets as clearly as I can because I want to ensure that my readers have a successful and super-happy relationship by finding the right ferret."

People need to know that ferrets really are one of the most popular pets in the U.S.A. and also many other countries. Most of the problems which happen between ferrets and their owners are because the owner is not aware of something important.

I hope that my ebook will help more people find their ferret and enjoy years of fun and make many wonderful memories together.

Introduction

Owning a ferret is not the same experience as you get with your own cat or dog.

Ferrets are classified somewhere between cats and dogs although they are similar in appearance to stoats and weasels. They have some traits which are similar to dogs and cats, but have their own special appeal and, of course, their own needs which are quite different to other types of pets.

I wrote this ebook especially to help people that were considering getting a ferret or had their first ferret and maybe still had some questions or concerns. The experienced owner may also find some information which might be new to them.

I hope that reading this ebook will help you, at whatever stage you are with ferrets, to have many happy years in their company.

Ferrets are considered an exotic animal. That may be part of their appeal; having a pet which is not the same as everyone else's pet.

But, it's important to realize that is probably a temporary appeal. These fuzzy creatures have many positive features which will cause the owner great pleasure in the future.

I have tried to cover as many points as possible to help you with your ferret and the links in the resource section should make it easier for you to connect with qualified experts, breeders and other owners and suppliers of gear which can help you make your ferret happier and more comfortable.

I will point out some things which can make ferrets less attractive pets in some circumstances. That's important because too many ferrets are abandoned each year by desperate owners who cannot cope with caring for them or afford the costs involved.

Let's start with some of the most important things you need to know about having a friendly ferret or two in your home.

Before You Get Your Ferret

Why do you want to have a ferret?

If you want one because it's cool or different, you will become disappointed and probably stressed fairly quickly, because keeping a ferret looking good and healthy takes some work and a lot of time.

A ferret is really good pet for someone that wants to share their home with it and invest a significant amount of time and attention in return for a lot of fun and companionship.

If your very young child saw one on TV and wants one desperately, you should say, "No." Very young children are at some risk if they handle ferrets and there is a strong chance that they could also cause serious injury to the animal.

I would never recommend getting a pet ferret if you don't already have one and you do have very young children.

However, you should not have any problems if you already have a pet ferret and a baby or small child joins your household.

You will know enough about ferrets in general and your own ferret in particular to control it. Just ensure that the child and the ferret are supervised by a responsible person when they are anywhere near each other for their mutual safety.

Nobody would take a ferret near a baby any more than they would take any other animal too close.

A Ferret May Not be for You

I am going to point out some factors which might discourage some people from getting a ferret.

It is important to look past their cute appearance and intelligence and be aware of these other factors so that you make the decision which is right for you and the ferret.

Some of the most important factors which you need to consider when you are thinking about getting one or more ferrets include damage to your property, health questions, injury from bites or scratches, cost of maintenance and their lifespan.

The major factor which could suggest that getting a ferret might not be the best option for you or the ferret is if your lifestyle does not allow for you to share three or more hours with your ferret almost every day.

All ferrets are highly social animals and a ferret which is alone for large parts of the time when it is awake will be unhappy. It is almost certain to become depressed and could develop health issues if the situation continues.

You can reduce the effects by getting another ferret for companionship. This will add some extra costs but you will get more enjoyment from their antics together and they will make their own fun if you cannot be with them as much as you would like to be.

They will enjoy each other's company but will also need to interact with you for some time each day. They are pets, not entertainment units.

Like any pet, there are costs involved. These can be more than you might pay if you have a dog or cat.

You need to find a veterinarian who has recent experience treating ferrets. They are becoming more common as ferrets become even more popular.

All ferrets will need at least three vet visits in their first year and one or two each year after that. From their seventh year, you will need regular vet checks to ensure the ferret is not suffering from any condition which it develops.

Finding the Right Vet for Your Ferret

You need to locate a veterinarian who is good with ferrets and has recent experience with them before you do anything about getting your ferret.

It really is that important.

Check with other ferret owners about their recommendations. I think this will always get you the most reliable recommendations.



You can also ask ferret breeders when you are deciding which one you will get your ferret from. If you see they look after their ferrets well, you can be confident that their recommendations are worth checking into.

Local pet stores are another source of contact information. But, keep in mind that some stores may have a relationship with particular vets where the store recommends the vet and vice versa. I am not suggesting that either would recommend someone that would not do good work but they may not always recommend the best vet for ferrets in the area.

If you have other pets but your regular vet does not treat ferrets, they would usually be able to give you a reliable recommendation of a colleague who has the needed expertise to treat your ferret.

If you don't have other pets, call a few local vets and ask those who say they don't treat ferrets if they can refer you to a local vet with the appropriate knowledge and experience.

If there are no vets who are currently treating ferrets in your area, you may find that a local agricultural college has a vet among the teaching staff who has the knowledge and interest. But, check whether they would be available

to treat your pet within a reasonable time and whether they are available outside of the college's teaching schedule.

If you cannot find one in your local area and you are certain that you want to get a ferret, you will have to be prepared to travel to the nearest vet and may not be able to reach them quickly enough in an emergency.

If you have found more than one suitable vet, visit each of their surgeries to get an idea of the professionalism of their business and their staff.

If you have not had a ferret as a pet before you can expect that other ferret owners in your area will be very willing to share their knowledge.

You should also ask for some advice from your vet when you take your new pet for the first visit.

But, you will probably have to pay for a longer than usual appointment. Write down your questions so that you don't forget to ask about anything you are concerned about.

Make sure you understand the answers fully.

Protecting Your Home from Your new Pet!

You probably won't see that heading in a book about having a cat or dog as a house pet, although they can obviously also cause damage to your property.

Ferrets are explorers and burrowers and they use their teeth and claws in those activities. So, the risks to your possessions and the ferret as well may be much greater than when you get a new Fido or Tiddles.

The fact is that all ferret owners have to accept the need to protect parts of their homes from their ferret and take precautions to protect the ferret from possible misadventures, as a price they willingly pay for the enjoyment their pets give them.

Please don't let yourself be scared off unless your home is full of period furniture and other priceless heirlooms.

Even then, you might feel that your attraction to a particular ferret is strong enough that you will make a protected space available for your new pet, but somewhere where its presence won't affect the insurance premiums too much.

Let's get started with one of the most important warnings:

Dangerous Little Treasures

Ferrets will steal any small items which you or anyone else leaves lying about. This can be cute at first but it soon becomes annoying and inconvenient to us as well as being potentially dangerous for the pet.

They will usually hide whatever they take somewhere in your home. That's annoying when you lose a couple of pieces of a jig-saw puzzle but becomes dangerous if they chew and swallow those pieces.

Ferret owners lose keys and many other items every day.

Batteries are shiny, so they are very attractive. But they can be deadly to a ferret, especially the button type in cameras, hearing aids and many other devices.

Most people never have to do the sort of precautionary check which every new ferret owner has to do before bringing home their new pet.

I suggest that you allow a significant amount of time for it or you could find your pet injured at some time because it found a hole or electric cord which you overlooked.

Holes and Gaps

A common saying among ferret owners is, "Where the head can fit, the body will follow." This might seem impossible when you compare the size of your pet's head with the width of its body, but it is very true.

Any ferret can get its body into any space where it can get its head! Please keep this in mind when you are setting up barriers around your house or you might find that your ferret gets injured or stuck. You might even have to pull a wall down to get it out!

They will get under or inside furniture, and just about anywhere else that you don't want them to if the opportunity is there. That will cause damage to your property and injury to your pet.

Please understand that many appliances and other items which we have in our homes can be dangerous for your fuzzy in ways which you may not realize.

If a ferret gets under something they may not be able to get out. But, there may be hidden risks. One person I know of, found their ferret had touched a lever on the underside of an appliance and it hit the ferret's neck and it died. Recliner chairs, rockers and many other items which we might think are very safe can cause serious injuries or death to inquisitive ferrets. They have no fear. You must check everything and try to imagine you are just as small as a ferret and as slippery as an eel!

Out and about: Ferrets are fairly smart. They can learn to lift a latch and will push at anything which blocks them from getting closer to something which looks or smells attractive.

Make sure that all windows, doors and hatches (such as pet doors) are firmly secured or your pet will go missing at the first opportunity. Pet ferrets are at

very high risk if they escape. Few will survive more than one or two terrifying days, whether in rural or built-up areas.

Portable play area: A friend has a playpen which was first used by her children. It folds up for transporting and she now uses it as a temporary play area for the family ferret.

I use a folding pet pen, with a layer of wire-netting on the outside which I added because the gaps were too wide to restrict the ferret from getting out.

Always give them one of their toys in the pen. Put your pet’s litter tray and lock a water bottle to the side of the pen. If you put a water bowl in the pen or their cage, they will spill it every time.

Ensure that the ferret is comfortable and secure in the temporary enclosure or it may become distressed when you put it there in the future.

I also recommend that you put a waterproof liner underneath the play area as well. Ensure that this is made from something which the ferret will not chew. Also, it must not be made of anything which the ferret could catch a claw in or get pieces which it might swallow and cause a serious problem.

When not in use, my friend’s folded playpen is used as a barrier to keep their ferret from roaming into a room or a section of their home.

Make sure that they cannot climb over any barrier and that it is secured so that it cannot fall and injure the ferret or damage anything nearby if they try to move it or get around it.

Anything the Ferret might nibble or consume: You will know that you must lock away all substances which are potentially harmful to your new pet. Cleaning products, gardening products and medicines are three obvious things.

You also need to prevent your ferret from getting at food provided for any other household pets. They each have different dietary requirements and other pet foods could even be harmful to your pet.

The ferret is also at risk if it finds soft materials to chew or consume, such as foam, plastic, rubber, etcetera.

Many of these materials will interfere with your pet's digestive or excretory system. At a minimum, they will suffer a lot so make sure that they cannot get at these items.

Do a full check of your home before getting your ferret. You will probably find potential hazards which you may have forgotten about. It's much better that you find and deal with them before the ferret does!

Ferrets and Other Pets

There are many homes where ferrets and other pets are happily co-existing, but there are some combinations which are more likely to cause problems, even death, than others!



You must consider the natural traits of the different types of creatures before you make any decision to add a ferret to a family that already has one or more dogs, cats or other creatures as pets.

The needs and welfare of any pet which you already have should be your first consideration, however much you or some other family member might want to bring in a new pet.

Some cats and fewer dogs co-exist with a new ferret. But, any mixture of animals should always be supervised closely, even if they have been getting along together for a while. If one gets into another's usual resting area, takes a toy or some of the other's food, there could be a fight.

The natural instincts of any of the pets may take over from your training in an instant in such circumstances and pets could hurt or even kill each other. That is a tragedy but I hope that you give the surviving pet a chance – not even humans are always capable of resisting the urges which they have inherited.

You should ask yourself if you will be able to keep both the pets in separate areas if they become aggressive toward each other, or if one starts looking at the other as a potential meal?

Cats seem to be more often suited for mixing with a ferret than many dogs are.

Remember that some dogs are only recently descended from hunting dogs and those traits are probably still present to some degree, even in the friendliest dog.

Dogs, ferrets and cats, like any other creature, will strike out if they feel threatened. Most dogs will become aggressive to some extent if your ferret gets too close to their toys or food.

Note: Ferrets can be harmed by feeding them food prepared and intended for other animals such as dogs and cats. Always provide food which is recommended specifically for ferrets and ensure they cannot get at food designed for other types of pets.

But, the main risk is that any of them might harm the other by reflex action and probably without meaning to.

So, think through the various possible events before you make your decision about having a ferret with other pets and vice-versa.

Larger animals can easily harm a smaller animal without meaning to do anything bad.

All three are meat eaters, and ferrets are often fed mice and other small creatures, so you should never let them near kittens or very small puppies. They may be hungry or the parent animal may become aggressive toward the ferret, trying to protect their young from the potential threat it sees in this predatory animal.

Rabbits, rodents, birds and even snakes would be considered prey by a ferret. So, they should not be kept anywhere that a ferret could reach. That mostly rules out any place inside a house where you keep a ferret.

Training Your Ferret



This little fuzzy looks unhappy but bathing is important for their health. They will get used to being bathed. Just be gentle and maybe give them a reward or play with them afterward.

Ferrets are fairly smart creatures though the level of practical intelligence can vary, just as it does between us humans.

Your ferret will adapt to wearing a lead or a harness (I strongly recommend that you always use a proper harness!). You can train a ferret to use a toilet box (don't expect 100% success), do tricks and come to its name.

Toilet Training

The most important training is to get it to use its litter box.

If you are lucky and patient and you don't rush the breeder into supplying your **kit** (baby ferret) too soon, or if you get a rescued ferret from a shelter, you will probably find that the kit's mother or the older ferret's previous owner has trained it to use a litter box.

But, it's best to be prepared to do this training yourself. It's not hard if you are very understanding, patient and consistent.

Also, please understand that almost no ferrets are perfect with their poop placement – something over 90% is about the best you can hope for. Of course, almost any ferret will have some accidents as they get old or when they have an illness.

A plastic litter box is fine. It can be a good idea to use one with a lower edge on the side which the ferret uses to get into the box. This can also be helpful when the ferret is getting on in years or sick.

Put the box in a corner of the cage. During the early training period, it's a good idea to have extra litter boxes in any area where the ferret is roaming to minimize accidents.

Each time you see your new ferret wake up, put it into the litter box and keep it there until it does its duty.

Cleaning the litter box thoroughly is important for the ferret's health, but many owners leave a small piece of ferret poo in the box in the first stages of training until the ferret shows that it knows what the box is for.

Don't punish the ferret for the occasional accident; not even human children always get it right every time when they are in training.

Your ferret will usually back into a corner of the litter box to poo.

Which Litter is Better?

Ferret owners have different views about the relative value of different materials for use in their ferret's litter box.

Some people are happy with shredded newspaper. It's cheap and easy to get. If you use this, I suggest that you try to get the blank newsprint rather than using old newspapers. The ink on the newsprint may transfer to your pet's fur and some inks used may even cause problems for your pet.

Check if your local newspaper sells the ends of the rolls of blank newsprint they use. This is also useful for children's artwork and informal presentations at school or work.

Avoid using any cardboard cartons near your ferret if they have printing on them. Ferrets could chew the box and some inks may not be safe for them to swallow.

Clay litter is popular but is likely to produce dust which can be a serious problem. That dust can get onto your furnishings and also may cause your ferret to develop some breathing problems.

Wood fiber pellets are very absorbent and may help to reduce odor problems. Any litter material which consists of small pellets is likely to be at least tasted by your ferret. Some may cause problems with the ferret's digestion or excretion. Always check with your vet before trying something new.

Because ferret owners and pet supply companies are continually trying new materials, I suggest that you check with your ferret's vet for recommendations based on their current knowledge, experience and the feedback they are likely to get from other ferret owners and other vets.

Stop Your Ferret Biting

I gave this section that particular title because it's a question I've heard often.

But, most ferret owners agree that ferrets don't bite people or other ferrets very often unless they are provoked or they are using a gentle nip to get attention.



A young ferret is likely to nip when its teeth are growing. It may become more likely to bite if it gets attention when it does it.

You must stop this because a ferret that bites is likely to be confiscated and

euthanized in many jurisdictions. That's because ferrets can carry canine distemper and rabies, so they and their owners get little leeway in this area.

I must say that the risks are very low because all responsible ferret owners keep their ferrets immunized against these conditions from an early age.

But, that may not be enough to save your pet if they bite someone and are reported.

The action which is currently recommended is to gently, but firmly, scruff the ferret (hold it by the loose fur at the back of its neck) and hiss at it.

A mother ferret would hiss at its young **kits** to discourage them, so your young ferret will understand from your hiss that it must not bite or nip.

When you scruff your ferret, always support its lower body with your other hand to prevent any risk of damage which may be caused if its body just dangled without any support.



Stop that!

The most effective way I have found to discourage behavior which you don't want to continue is to scruff your pet, gently but firmly and hiss at it with your face close to its nose but far enough away that it doesn't accidentally nip you or scratch you if it raises a paw between you.

This is the action which the mother ferret uses, so your ferret will immediately understand you are unhappy and will probably know what action you don't want it to do again.

But, ***never*** hit or slap your ferret. There is a real risk that you will injure it because it is a fairly delicate creature. You will definitely damage the bond you are building between you and your pet. That can be very difficult to fix. And, your ferret may not associate the punishment with whatever behavior you are unhappy about.

It is more likely to think you just don't like your ferret any more. This will make it harder, not easier, to teach it tricks or other commands in the future because all training needs a basis of trust between you.

Some people have "trained" animals of all kinds by using the threat of punishment through the years. It is never as effective as using respect and rewards. When the animal trusts you, it will work better because it really wants to please you instead of being afraid of displeasing you.

Setting Up Your Ferret's New Home

Your Ferret's Cage

You need to have a suitable cage for your ferret to be in when you or another responsible member of your family cannot supervise it. It is also important for the ferret to have a safe and comfortable refuge because they sleep more than many other types of pets.

Some features which your ferret will appreciate are having a second level, a hammock, enough level, free space on each level for a play area, feeders, a water dripper and a reasonably sized litter box.

Whether you will get just one ferret the first time or get two ferrets so they can be company for each other, make sure that you provide enough space.

Wire cages are okay but you need to cover the floors with a solid surface to prevent the ferret hurting its paws or legs.

I use linoleum because it is less likely than other materials to absorb any urine or other liquids that could be spilled in the cage.

This is a good time to mention an important point:

**Always use quality materials for
what you give to your pets.**

For instance, some people might economize by using second-hand lino for the flooring. That might be okay, but it could hurt you pet if there are cracks in it where they might catch a claw, or parts are fraying and dust is coming off it (any kind of dust is a potential hazard for ferrets).

If you use second-hand equipment, make sure that it is thoroughly cleaned. You have to be sure that it does not have any bugs, diseases or faults which could harm your pet.

No Go Zones

Your ferret should be prevented from getting into any area where there are chemicals or other substances which could harm them through poisoning or causing internal damage.

Baths, toilets and any other area where there is even a small amount of water can be a drowning hazard for ferrets. Keeping the toilet lid down is not sufficient protection for an inquisitive ferret.

They may also injure themselves trying to get in or out of those items.

Another hazard which is less common with other pets is caused by a ferret's natural tendency to sleep whenever it gets the chance.

It will get into piles of laundry. Those have been the last resting place of many a poor, sleepy pet ferret. They are also known to get in or under towels and even carpet which is only loosely secured around the edges. That's one reason for the ferret's nickname, "carpet shark"!

When you have a ferret in your home always sort through laundry before putting it in your machine or tossing it into a cupboard, even if you are reasonably sure that your pet is actually safely locked in its cage.

It is always better to check rather than risk their safety by trusting to luck where ferrets are concerned.

Keep these "Fun items" Away from your Pet!

There are some things that ferrets are sometimes given as toys which can be actually hazardous to your ferret.

Some people let their ferret play with plastic bags from the supermarket. They are always careful to cut off the loops which you put your hands through because a ferret could get the bag twisted around its body or its neck and suffer serious injury if the loops were left on the bag.

But, I don't think the bags are safe enough for ferrets. I think a ferret, or a couple of ferrets could rip holes in the bags and that would give you two potentially serious risks.

Your pet could get their head or body stuck in the holes they made or they could pull small pieces of plastic off the bags and then swallow them.

Ferrets are quick to swallow almost anything, but their digestive and excretory systems are a bit delicate.

You might have to have an obstruction removed by your vet at a cost of several hundred dollars or you might lose you pet.

Your ferret can easily bite or chew small pieces off any rubber (latex) toys, and any which are made from similar materials. They will swallow the pieces with similar drastic problems to those I described above. These toys may be okay for other types of pets but are a proven risk with ferrets.

Don't give your ferret any toys which have soft squeakers (they'll rip the squeaker apart or squeeze out the reed and swallow it faster than you could ever hope to react).

Fabric covered toys may contain small beads or other materials which could harm your ferret. If your pet tears the material, it might swallow pieces of it.

Do not ever let your ferret or any other pet near any kind of balloon, whether it is inflated or not. They could choke on a small piece of latex and there is no way to save them from the terrible ordeal.

Playing with Your Ferret

Ferrets like playing as much as they like sleeping and they do a lot of both. I have read that many ferrets will sleep up to twenty hours a day.

But, they are *very* active when they are awake. You need to be well rested or you may find it hard to keep up with your pet.

Some commercial toys sold for dogs or cats will be enjoyed as much by your ferrets.

Old sweat pants and other soft clothing can get your ferret exploring. They will sleep in anything like this which they find, whether it is supposed to be for their use or not.

That's why you must never step on any clothing or other soft items which are on the floor anywhere in your home, there may be a sleeping ferret inside!

Plastic pipe is a great, inexpensive toy which ferrets will get a lot of fun and exercise from. The pipe needs to be wide enough to let the ferret move easily through it. If you join some pieces together with T-sections and other joiners, you will give your pet(s) a puzzle which they will delight in running through.

I have seen some pipe which is corrugated and transparent. I think it would be great to watch your pet running through it.

Plastic balls with bells or other items inside which make a noise as the ball is rolled over the floor are also attractive to ferrets. These are often sold for cats and birds. Just make sure before you offer it to your pet, that there is no chance that any part of the contents could fall out or be taken out of the ball by your pet. Double check this and keep in mind that ferrets are strong and determined when they try to get something.

Ferrets are attracted to toys which squeak or make other noises.

One which I only heard of recently which I think would be great for any ferret is called a "Babble Ball". This is a plastic ball, either two or three inches in diameter, with some electronics inside. They seem to be well constructed, so the working parts are not accessible by the ferret.

There is a motion sensor and a gizmo which makes the sounds of various animals randomly when the ball is moved even slightly. I saw a couple of videos and one thing which struck me was the ferrets would roll the ball or grasp it, like any other animal would. But, both ferrets I saw with the device would start going backwards when the noisemaker started! This did not seem to have any bad effect on them but it looked very funny.

I have not tried it but some owners get a large plastic storage container and they fill the container to within a few inches of the top with unprocessed rice, shredded blank newsprint (buy this on a roll from your local newspaper – do not use printed newspapers because the ink could kill your pet) or real peanuts (never use plastic or Styrofoam of any kind).

If you set one of these up for your pets, check with your vet or other owners about the best material to use. New ideas are being tried all the time and some materials may be shown to have risks which are not well known at the time I am writing this ebook.

Keeping it Legal

It surprises some people that ferrets are usually on everyone's lists of "most popular pets", but many areas restrict their presence and freedom or even ban them completely.

If you live in an area where ferrets are banned avoid the risk of legal sanction and death for any ferrets you have by obeying the law. By all means work to get it changed but don't provoke the authorities into taking action against you and your pet which will, inevitably pay the highest price. If you are caught, you could be heavily fined as well as lose your pet.

It is also very likely that your reputation with people around you and, especially, the local authorities will be tarnished. That might work against you when you deal with them on other matters. Bureaucrats have long memories.

I understand the thinking of some, if not all, of those legislators. I accept they are usually trying to protect the well-being and even the health of their communities.

Ferrets can carry canine, distemper, and rabies. All responsible ferret owners have their pets or breeding stock immunized against these and other potential risks.

Ferret owners should keep the papers relating to registration, vaccination and other health matters of their ferrets readily available to be shown if there is ever a problem.

Never argue with anybody that thinks ferrets are dangerous or smelly. Arguments don't change people's minds, facts might.

Keep printed information about ferrets from reputable sources on hand to give to anyone that repeats any of the negative myths that are around about ferrets. Ask them to meet your ferret and then let them make up their own mind. This can help build better neighborhood relationships for you and all ferret owners in your area.

I have to say that the appearance of the ferret can make people think it is dangerous if they have not had any experience with handling it.

But, I am glad to say that many jurisdictions are changing their laws to let ferrets co-exist with their citizens.

If you live in an area where ferrets are banned or have other limitations on them, you must obey those restrictions.

And, that can sometimes be a little harder than it should be.

Feeding Your Ferret

Ferrets require a meat-based diet. It should have at least thirty per cent protein, a high fat content and be low in fiber.

They cannot digest vegetables easily and most commercial feed produced for dogs and cats would not be suitable for ferrets.



Check with your vet before giving your ferret any commercial product or making any changes to their diet.

There are some good commercially prepared ferret foods.

Biscuits sold for human consumption, chocolate, sweets and manufactured meat or sausages should not be given to ferrets.

If you don't know for sure that it only contains material which is safe and beneficial for your ferret, do not feed it to your pet.

Do not give your pet any vitamins or other supplements without checking the particular product first directly with your vet.

I suggest that you give your pet small amounts of food at a time and clear away any scraps when they have been fed. Ferrets will play with their food and you should get rid of any which has been removed from the feed bowl even if you think it is clean.

Ferrets need access to clean drinking water at all times. A water bottle which is fixed to the side of the cage and suspended upside down with a ball valve in a spout that releases the water gradually when the ferret pushes its snout against it is the best and safest way to provide water.

I suggest that you never use a water bowl because the ferret will tip it over or even throw it around the cage. Then, you will need to clean and dry the area, then replace everything which was damaged.

The big risk is that you might not realize that the ferret has spilled all its water. This could lead to a serious risk of dehydration which is always serious, but could have dire consequences to the ferret's health in hot weather.

Using a heavy bowl for their water can reduce the mess they will cause, but there are still risks. You must put the bowl on the bottom level of the cage to prevent it falling on and damaging equipment in the cage or even hurting the ferret.

Your ferret will get in any bowl to sleep and to play, creating a mess and also risking drowning if the water is sufficiently deep (lower than you might think).

Again, you had better be close by and ready to clean and dry everything, then replace the water.

Even if they don't get hurt in the bowl, they will foul the water with small bits of their droppings or other material which they have on their feet or their fur. This can cause them to get sick if they drink any of the tainted water.

What People Know About Ferrets is Wrong!

Many things which are "common knowledge" about ferrets is actually wrong! Their appearance is one factor in ferrets getting an undeserved, poor reputation which is behind some of the negativity they and their owners may face in some places.

They are not savage unless they have been mistreated and learned that they need to be aggressive to defend themselves, or they are alarmed just as any other pet or a human might react to supposed danger.

Dangerous to Native Wildlife

The ferrets which are available as pets are domesticated and would not have much chance of surviving long enough to cause problems for most wildlife if they are abandoned or get into country-side areas by some other way.

They are not wild animals and would suffer terribly before being killed by a wild predator or hit by a car when they try to cross a road. If they avoided that fate, they would slowly starve.

What About the Smell?

Don't worry, most ferrets are not as smelly as most people assume. The breeders usually remove their anal glands and de-sex the males which are the ones which have the most pronounced musky odor.



This can still be at a level which is offensive to some people. But, most are okay with it unless the ferret's living conditions are below standard, it is not kept clean or it is subject to high stress situations. Then, the poor animal is likely to smell more than it would if it was properly looked after.

Bathing will not hurt a ferret but should not be done more often than every couple of weeks or you will remove some of the oils which keep its fur healthy.

Do You Need Two Ferrets?



Ferrets are very sociable animals. If they don't get a lot of interaction with their owner every day, they will not thrive.

They may become depressed and possibly even bad-tempered. If this continues for a period, their health may suffer to some degree.

Getting two ferrets at the same time is probably the best way to prevent that sort of problem.

Two ferrets from the same litter could be an ideal solution. Get them desexed unless you intend to breed from them for resale.

Otherwise, please never let your ferret breed because there are already far too many abandoned ferrets for the shelters and willing adopters available.

Before deciding whether to get a ferret to share your home and your life, you should very carefully work through all the factors.

That will include:

- 💰 The cost of keeping the ferrets over, say, eight years each.
- 💰 Their inevitable bills for veterinarian visits and other requirements.
- 💰 Changes to your home to accommodate and protect the ferret(s) without undermining the enjoyment of other members of your family, including other pets.
- 💰 The extra space requirement for the ferret(s).
- 💰 The demands on your time to keep the pet happy and healthy.

Your partner and the rest of the family will also be affected by the presence of the ferrets, so they need to be considered and consulted.

If not, they will feel that they are being taken for granted instead of being respected and involved in the decision.

Getting to Know Your Ferret

Ferrets are fun pets. They like to sleep a lot. Some people estimate that a ferret may sleep up to 20 hours a day! They will sleep anywhere and love to crawl in or under things. Many ferrets are seriously injured by being sat on or stepped on while they are asleep under piles of clothing, recliners and many other places – everyone needs to be very careful all the time in a house with a ferret.

They are not a pet to just have in their pen for you to look at. You should give them as much attention as possible. They have lots of energy when they are awake and are always ready for some fun.

A male ferret (called a **hob**) will average about 15 inches (about 38 centimeters) long from the tip of the nose to the end of their tail and usually weighs from 2 to 4^{1/2} pounds.

A female ferret (called a **jill**) will average about 13 inches (about 33 centimeters) long from the tip of the nose to the end of their tail and usually weighs from 1 pound to 2^{1/2} pounds.

It is advisable to have your pet de-sexed. There are too many ferrets who are abandoned to die alone or dropped into already overflowing shelters to breed them unless you are going to make a serious business of it.

That is outside the scope of this book. I would not want to discourage anyone who has that goal but, for the sake of the ferrets' future and your own, please do thorough research on the potential market and competition in your area first. It's also important to get some idea about the public's attitude to ferrets where you live.

Looking after Your Ferret

Please consult your vet or an experienced ferret owner in your area about any change in the health or appearance of your pet's skin or fur.

Every ferret owner needs some accessories to groom their ferret and care for it. Grooming your pet is considered a chore but it is also a wonderful chance to bond with it.

You can also use the time to check your ferret for any changes in its appearance or behavior which might be the first sign of a possible problem.

Because we are near our pets so much, we sometimes don't notice when they gain weight or something changes with their appearance slowly. Always check them over while you are brushing them or doing any other "maintenance".

Brushing Your Ferret

This is very important to reduce the risk of your ferret swallowing loose hair which will become a hairball and can then cause serious problems, possibly requiring surgery.

As well as frequent brushing, every ferret should be given a hairball preventative preparation designed for ferrets. These are some help against a serious potential problem. Some ferrets actually like taking some of these flavored mixtures.

Use a soft brush designed for cats or a rubber groomer. Brushing your ferret will be easier if you do it often for a short time, rather than try to do a thorough brushing less often.

Nail Clippers

Your ferret needs its nails clipped regularly as the mostly soft floor coverings it plays on in your home won't wear them down enough to keep the nails a comfortable length for the ferret and the family members who handle it.

Get the best quality available or you may affect the health of your ferret through damaging its feet. The clippers with a small notch in the blade which are sold for cats work well if used with care.

Clippers which are designed and sold for humans are not worth using on your precious ferret. Get the type recommended by your vet or an experienced owner of ferrets. Also, ask for some instruction before clipping the first nail. A short practice session will save you and the ferret a lot of stress.

Clipping the ferret’s nails is easy once you have done a few. The most important point is to just clip a little from the sharp point and make sure that you never cut so much that you cut into the living core of the nail, called the **quick**.

Even if you can see the quick clearly inside the light-colored nails of your ferret, don’t get too close to the quick or the pressure when you use the clippers may hurt the ferret even if you don’t damage the quick itself.

If you are not sure where the safe area is, get someone with more experience to cut the nails while you watch so that you get a better idea of what to look for.

If your ferret is restless or you are nervous, get someone else to scruff the ferret while you cut its nails. Make sure that the ferrets body and back legs are supported and still while you cut its nails. This support will reduce the possibility of injury to the ferret’s paws and its back.

Many ferrets become so used to the procedure when done carefully and regularly, they just lay there chewing on a treat.

If you cause any nail to bleed, applying a small amount of a styptic powder product is the best action. Always keep some on hand.

If you do not have any styptic powder, dab the end of the paw with flour. The styptic is quicker and better even though it may sting the ferret when applied.

Keep the ferret on your lap until you are sure that the bleeding has stopped completely. Never leave the ferret until the bleeding has stopped and it is calm.

Ear Care

Your ferret will probably get a noticeable amount of wax in its ears. That's not unusual. You need to clean them regularly.

You can use a cotton-tipped swab to wipe the outer part of the ear with some approved ear solution from your vet or quality pet store.

Only wipe the outer part of the ear with the swab.

it is very important not to push the tip into the ear because the eardrum is very close to the surface and it is too easy to cause pain and permanent damage. Applying any pressure to the swab when it is on the ear could push wax deep into the ear against the drum where it would be hard to remove and could result in damage.

Harness

A collar is not ideal for a ferret because there is a risk that they might get it caught on something and choke.

The one time you might want to use a collar is when you are in the same room as the ferret and letting it roam around.

If you have a small bell on the harness you will hear where your fuzzy friend is. Choose a bell which is fully enclosed so your pet cannot get any small parts out of it. A ferret is highly inquisitive and smart. They will remove the clapper from a bell if they can and they will probably swallow that or the small bent piece of wire which held it inside the bell. That will be extremely dangerous for the ferret.

Using the collar and bell combination with all due care will reduce any risk that you might step on a mat or discarded clothing where the ferret is hiding and injure it.

If you do this, it is also essential that you remain very close to avoid any risk of the ferret catching the collar on something and choking or damaging its neck.

A ferret needs a harness and a detachable lead. If you just use a harness attached to a collar, your ferret will pull a lot and you will be putting extra pressure on your pet’s neck when you are taking it for a walk.

The harness spreads the pressure over the ferret’s upper body and should be much more comfortable.

Ferrets will get out of their harness if they can, so you need to adjust it carefully. Allow a gap about the width of your little finger between the ferret’s body and the harness but no more than that.

Watch your ferret very carefully, especially the first few times you use the harness to ensure that there is no risk of it deliberately slipping out of the harness.

Many ferrets will resist having their harness on until they get used to it and realize that putting the harness on means that you will take them for a walk.

You will need a supply of treats for the ferret when you first put (or try to put) its harness on.

Put the ferret on your lap, stroke it for a little while so that it starts to be calm. Then, clip the collar part of the harness around its neck and carefully adjust it.

Give your pet the first treat.

Putting the second loop around its body will be a little more complicated because you will have to carefully adjust it to the length of your ferret.

The ferret will probably be trying to get out of it before you even get it on.

So, remain calm and give more treats as needed.

Use a strong, but light lead and make sure that the clips are very firm because your ferret will try anything it can to get out of the harness. Some leads have cheap, light clips with soft springs and the lead could slip through them when the ferret starts zig-zagging about.

Retractable harnesses can be useful but I would use a regular lead which was not too long.

Walking Your Ferret

Give your ferret at least three short sessions (up to five minutes) running around by itself inside a sealed room with you present before attaching the lead for the first time.

When you take your pet out for the first few walks, carry it outside.

Discourage it if it tries to go through a door to the outside without its harness and lead already on.

Just as you did inside, your first few outside sessions should be in an enclosed area where the ferret can explore but cannot get away.

Never let your ferret off its lead while it is outside. It only needs one chance and the smallest of gaps in a fence and you may never play with your ferret again.

Make sure that your ferret has its immunizations up-to-date and it is past the period between its shots being given and becoming effective before you risk taking it outside.

Keep it away from other animals and avoid anywhere they have used as a toilet to reduce the risk of your ferret catching an infection or worse.

Despite the possible risks, you and your ferret will get fun and healthy exercise from regular walks. These adventures will also make the ferret more likely to want to sleep when it returns home with you, so you will be able to do some of your chores more easily.

Resources

I have no commercial connection with or bias about any of these sites or resources. I do not offer any endorsement of these sites. Always keep your computer protected and be very careful whenever you are on the Internet.

Many of the resources have products for sale but the listings are here because they seem to be focused on helping ferret owners and ferrets, which is the goal of this ebook as well.

Ferret Organizations and Support Sites

U.S.A.

American Ferret Association Inc

<http://ferret.org/>

It started in 1987 as a ferret club in Maryland. They focus on public education about ferrets, hold ferret shows, encourage on-going training of veterinarians about ferrets and support the program which helps the endangered wild Black Footed Ferret.

Animal Channel – Ferret Section

<http://www.smallanimalchannel.com/ferrets/default.aspx>

Much information and videos for all ferret owners.

Black Footed Ferret on U.S.A. Government sites.

http://www.azgfd.gov/w_c/blackfooted_ferret.shtml

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/blackfootedferret/>

The Black Footed Ferret is one of America's most endangered species.

United Kingdom

The British Ferret Club

<http://www.britishferretclub.org.uk/>

This seems to be sponsored by a manufacturer of ferret food. They have an online forum which anyone may join and also set up displays with ferret information at shows around the U.K. The site is worth a visit.

Message from their website: "We no longer have a membership due to the sheer number of people, please join our forum instead."

Australia

South Australian Ferret Association

<http://saf.aadvancedscripting.com.au/public/>

The Association was formed in 1989 to help promote the domestic ferret. Their Code of Ethics is interesting reading.

Ferret Enthusiasts of Tasmania

http://www.tco.asn.au/oac/community_groups.cgi?groupID=643&oacID=35

A small group of volunteers offers information of use to all ferret owners.

Ferret Society of Canberra

<http://www.ferretclub.org.au/>

A club offering good information on its website. Its motto, "For the health and happiness of FERRETS, For the support and enjoyment of OWNERS".

Ferret Shelters

United Kingdom Ferret Shelters

Please do your own checking about any shelter which you intend to get a ferret from or which you will support with money or time.

Volunteers are always needed.

<http://www.animalrescuers.co.uk/html/ferrets.html>

A list at Animal Rescuers web site.

United States of America Ferret Shelters

<http://ferret.org/links/shelters.html>

This list, at the site of the American Ferret Association Inc, has shelters in the U.S.A, Canada and New Zealand.

Ferret Veterinarians

Please do your own checking about any vet which you intend to have treat your ferret.

U.S.A.

<http://ferret.org/links/vets.html>

List of vets who are Members of the American Ferret Association Inc, including some outside the U.S.A.

U.K.

<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/ferreter/vetlist.htm>

List on the site of the [National Ferret Welfare Society](#)

http://ferretsinnneed.org.uk/index.php?pr=Ferret_Friendly_Vets

List on the site of [Ferrets in Need](#) , a charitable organisation independent of any welfare or rescue whose aims are to raise money for ferrets and ferret related equipment in ferret welfare organisations, provide help and advice to new and would be ferret owners, discourage the indiscriminate breeding of ferrets and enhance the profile of ferrets as companion animals for adults

Ferret Owners' Sites

<http://www.ferret-world.com/> (Australia)

This site by a ferret owner caught my eye because of the amount of information. There are many other sites with as much or more, of course, but I thought this was a good representative example of the enthusiasm which ferrets inspire in their owners.

EverythingFerret.com

http://www.everythingferret.com/favorite_links.htm

I found on her blog that the person running this web site for twelve years is also an actress and artist who works as a paraprofessional ABA therapist for children on the autism spectrum. Her site is well worth visiting. Don't let the number of advertisements put you off – lots of information!

Alyson's Afterword

I hope that you enjoy your years with your ferret or ferrets. I envy you because you will soon start to learn why a rapidly growing number of proud owners are so fanatical about the pets.

Ferrets are fun-loving, intelligent and always coming up with something new to ensure you both have fun every day.

I have put some warnings in his book but they are so you can get maximum fun with your fuzzy friend.

Alyson Baxter

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