

## Ferret – Basic Care

- Belong to the same family as otters, weasels, skunks, and mink.
- Males are called “Hobs,” females are called “Jills.”
- Ferrets are susceptible to wide variety of diseases such as canine distemper, human influenza and tuberculosis.
- Lack well-developed sweat glands, and as a result are predisposed to head prostration at temperatures of 32°C (90°F) or above.
- Do not normally bite, if they do, they will let go as soon as you let them go.
- Females can be housed singly or in groups, males should be housed individually after 12 weeks of age.
- Minimum cage sizes are not specified in the Animal Welfare Regulations and The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. However, it is suggested that ferrets can be kept in cat or rabbit cages as long as the door is close fitting and the bar spaces are narrow. Top-filled food hoppers without covers are not appropriate because a ferret can easily crawl through it when it is empty.
- Enrichment should be provided unless specified in the protocol and approved by the IACUC.
- Examples of enrichment:
  - Nest boxes to sleep in
  - Hammocks
  - Nylabones
  - Group housing
  - Kong toys
  - Ferret ball
  - Climbing devices
  - Food treats
- Should be fed a high quality commercially prepared ferret diet that is nutritionally complete.
- Ferrets are carnivorous but will eat a wide variety of foods.
- Food and water should be fed ad libitum.
- Handling a ferret is accomplished best by grasping it just behind the front legs with one hand and holding the rear legs with the other hand. Another method is the place one hand across the ferret’s shoulders the thumb and forefinger around the neck, and the other fingers around the chest behind the front lets.
- They can also be held by the loose skin in back of the neck.
- If ferrets are riled or hurt they may emit a foul-smelling substance from the sent glands located on either side of the anus.
- For more specific species information including physiologic data, husbandry and breeding requirements, or procedural information, please contact the Office of Laboratory Animal Care (865-974-5634).