

# **Domestic Ferret Facts:** Addressing the most common questions & concerns.

*Prepared by Angel City Ferret Club*

## **Ferrets are domestic animals, not wildlife.**

- The CDC<sup>1</sup>, Humane Society<sup>2</sup>, USDA<sup>3</sup> and over 150 zoological societies classify ferrets as domestic, not wildlife.
- Ferrets were domesticated from European polecats over 2000 years ago.<sup>4,5,6</sup>
- There are several studies linking domestic behaviors of animals, such as ferrets, to genetics.<sup>7</sup>
- Domestic ferrets, by definition, are an animal that has been tamed and kept by humans as a work animal, food source, or pet, through selective breeding, and became genetically different from their wild ancestors.<sup>8</sup>
- Domestic ferrets are the only domestic animal in the scientific family Mustelidae. They are not rodents and are cousin to the otter & black footed ferret of the central United States.

## **There are no feral domestic ferrets and ferrets do not spread rabies.**

- In 1996 and 2009, all 50 states were surveyed and none reported having a feral ferret population.<sup>9, 10</sup>
- The domesticated ferret only exists in people's homes.<sup>11</sup> If a domesticated ferret escapes to the outdoors it will not survive for more than a few days.<sup>12</sup>
- To avoid pet overpopulation the largest breeder, Marshall Farms, neuters (spay/castrate) and de-scents before selling their domestic ferrets.
- A Rabies vaccination specific to domestic ferrets has been available since 1988.<sup>13</sup> Less than one ferret per year test positive for rabies, in contrast to the more than 200 cats and 140 dogs that are found carrying the virus every year.<sup>14</sup>
- In the 1880s the New Zealand government imported, bred domestic ferrets with polecats, and released them in the thousands to assist with pest control. This led to a feral hybrid population, not a feral domestic ferret population.<sup>16</sup>

## **Domestic Ferrets do not have an impact on agriculture or wildlife populations.**

- Because there are no feral domestic ferrets, they do not inhabit natural ecosystems and have no roles.<sup>17</sup> Unlike cats, who are responsible for the deaths of 1.4 to 3.7 billion birds and 6.9 to 20.7 billion mammals every year.<sup>18</sup>
- In 2009, no state reported any major impact on agri-business, or any major opposition to ferrets.<sup>13</sup>

## **Domestic Ferrets make great pets.**

- Domestic ferrets are more 'dog-like' than 'wild ferret-like' due to genetic breeding.<sup>16</sup>
- They share many qualities with dogs & cats. They are affectionate, playful, intelligent, quiet, and small. Domestic ferrets adjust easily to humans schedules and are not nocturnal. They recognize their name, respond to verbal and visual commands, can learn to do tricks,<sup>12</sup> and can be trained to use a litter box.<sup>17</sup>
- Domestic ferrets can be used as service animals detecting seizures or providing emotional support.<sup>19, 20</sup>
- Ferrets can coexist peacefully and amicably with cats and dogs.<sup>21</sup>

## **Domestic Ferrets are not 'vicious, blood thirsty animals' and are safer than dogs.**

- Like all pets, ferrets need to be taught what is acceptable behavior.<sup>12</sup> Dogs are at least 200 times more likely to bite than are ferrets.<sup>22</sup> In fact, based off of statistics, you are more likely to be bitten by a cat, rabbit, snake, or even a human being than a domestic ferret.<sup>23</sup>
- The CDC indicate that a bite from a cat, dog, or even another human child is more severe than one from a ferret.<sup>11</sup>
- The media have sensationalized a few cases indicating that a ferret viciously attacked a baby or child. In all reported cases, the ferrets had suffered from extreme animal abuse (and in many cases, the child had also suffered from neglect.)<sup>11</sup>
- The ASPCA and the HSUS warn "that no pet should be left unsupervised with a child."<sup>23</sup> When ferrets are around small children the interaction should be monitored as closely as you would with any pet.

## References

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