



# Ferret

*Mustela putorius furo*



## Physical Characteristics:

I have a long slim body and long tail with soft fur that can be brown, black or white.

### Habitat / Climate

Forest of Europe

### Where am I from?

I originated in Europe. In 1877 I was introduced to the United States because farmers wanted something to control the rabbit population.



Europe

### Who are my relatives?

I am a *mammal* from the order *Carnivora* and the family *Mustelidae*. I am not a rodent. I am a domesticated form of the European polecat (weasel). A few wild ferrets, which are a hybrid ferret/polecat, still exist in New Zealand. Until recently skunks were considered part of my family. Otters, Weasels, mink, badgers and stoats are in my family.



### Other family members:

- Otter
- Weasels
- Mink
- Badger

### Breeding Potential

Litter size? 6-10

Number of offspring per year?

### How am I born?

My mother mates sometime during the March - August months and after a gestation period of 42-44 days, I am born deaf and with my eyes closed. The average litter is 8 kits. I nurse for about 8 weeks before I am weaned. At two weeks old I get some teeth and begin to eat solid food. When I am age 3-5 weeks my eyes open and I begin to hear.

### Breeding Season

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
| E | A | P | A | J | J | A | E | C | O | E |
| B | R | R | Y | L | L | P | P | T | V | C |

Females may come into heat more than once.

### How long does it take me to grow up and how long do I live?

I reach my adult weight of about 2 pounds, at 4 months old. My average length is about 20 inches counting my tail. I reach sexual maturity at 1 year old. If I am a male I will probably be about twice the size of a female. I can live 6 - 10 years.

### Names for:

- Adult male- Hob
- Adult female- Jill
- Young- Kits
- Group- Business

### What kind of family life do I have?

I am extremely social and enjoy playing with other ferrets and humans. I bond emotionally with other ferrets and if one of us dies I have been known to die within days of my partner.

### What do I eat and when do I eat?

I am a *carnivore* and I eat whole small prey. I am crepuscular and come out at dawn and dusk to feed and play. My digestive system can not digest vegetable matter and I should not eat milk products, sugar, or foods high in carbohydrates like bread. I sleep 14-18 hours a day but when I wake up I am very active.

### Who are my predators?

Birds of prey and large snakes will eat me.



### What is my relationship with man?

Ferrets have been domesticated for thousands of years. They were originally used for hunting mice, rabbits and rats. In some countries they are still used for hunting. They became popular as pets in the 1970's mainly through the efforts of Dr. Wendy Winstead. Ferrets can be disciplined as you would any other domestic pet, such as dogs and cats.