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## 1. Ferrets should spend most of their time in a cage.

Ferrets can live in cage quite nicely, but they need to be let out as often as possible for play and exercise. If you can't let them out every day, then you should not have a ferret (sorry, try fish)

Many owners rarely use a cage and give their ferrets complete run of the house or just several rooms. If you try this, make sure your house is well ferret-proofed. When in doubt, assume a ferret can and will get into it.

Ferrets should be supervised for their own safety during play time. Besides, that is when all the fun stuff happens.

## 2. Ferrets are nocturnal. They sleep all day and want to play all night.

Domestic ferrets are not nocturnal, and to the best of my knowledge none of the genetic relatives of the ferret are nocturnal.

Ferrets can sleep most of the day, like teenagers. What part of the day is really up to the owner. Ferrets can learn a cycle. If there is nothing better to do, they will sleep. If you let them out of their cage and play with them, they'll play. They will learn about what times are sleep times and about what times are play times from you.



## 3. Ferrets are rodents.

Ferrets do resemble long, skinny rats. But genetically speaking they are not rodents. Many people consider all small mammals to be rodents... they probably never watched much PBS when they were growing up.

Domestic Ferrets are *Mustela putorius furo* and part of the weasel(mustelid) family. Their closest genetic relative is believed to be the European Polecat.

## 4. Ferrets are wild and if they escape, they will form feral colonies that will threaten native wildlife.

Ferrets were domesticated by the Egyptians over 3000 years ago, before they domesticated cats.

There are no documented feral populations of ferrets in the United States. There is a well documented case of feral domestic ferrets in New Zealand, but they tried very hard to establish that population to counter-balance an English rabbit problem.

There is a "wild" and endangered Black Footed Ferret (BFF) in the United States. When colonists first came to the new world, the BFF reminded them of the domestic ferret in Europe... so they called it "a ferret". A domestic ferret and a Black Footed Ferret have as much in common as a domesticated dog breed and a wolf.

## 5. Ferrets bite, and cannot be handled without special gloves/equipment.

Ferrets bite often when they are young, because that is their play behavior with the other ferrets. Humans can quickly teach them the difference between humans and ferrets, and which are okay to bite.

Ferrets must be handled and loved in order to learn not to bite.

Ferrets sometimes bite when they are startled, scared, or hurt. Abused ferrets will bite often and hard. Still, with proper handling and love, they can learn not to bite.

In Europe, ferrets are still used for hunting. Ferreteers used special gloves when handling their "working" ferrets. Hunting with ferrets has been illegal in the United States since early this century.

Graham Cooke has enlightened me as to hunting practices with ferrets. Hunters no more use special gloves with hunting ferrets than with hunting dogs. Hunting animals

must be specially trained. He maintains a comprehensive page on the subject at <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/~phrrv/ferret.html>

The League of Independent Ferret Enthusiasts (L.I.F.E.) maintains a page devoted to bite statistics that compare dogs to ferrets. To sum it up, it very convincingly shows ferrets to be much less of a threat than dogs, even taking into account dog and ferret populations. By all means, check it out L.I.F.E Bites

It is my idealistic belief that if a ferret bites viciously and maliciously, that ferret has been or is being abused.

## 6. Ferrets represent a serious rabies vector.

There is an FDA approved rabies vaccine available

The number of verified rabies cases in ferrets are very small, and the cases of transmission of rabies from ferret to human are smaller. (Actual numbers are unavailable. Please send if you have them on hand)

Typically, ferrets spend little time outside, and their window of exposure to rabies is quite small.

Ferrets have sharp, skinny teeth and can easily puncture the skin (if not trained), and many people see that as a serious risk. Recent research on rabies in ferrets has turned up some very interesting findings. Dogs and cats shed the rabies virus in their saliva. So far, in laboratory infected research ferrets, the virus does not appear to be shed in the saliva. If this holds true, then ferret bites will not be able to transmit the rabies virus.

## 7. Ferrets have a strong odor and stink up your house.

All animals have distinct smells, and all humans have different tolerances for smells.

Whole ferrets can become quite musky when they come into season. Having a ferret fixed is the single most effective measure to make a ferret smell better.

A neutered male is less aggressive and less territorial, especially in season. There will be a marked difference in smell once he is fixed. Females must be spayed unless you

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plan and are able to breed her. Her “heat” cycle produces an increased estrogen level, which in turn suppresses the bone marrow, and prevents red blood cell production and makes the ferret anemic. She can die from this anemia, and it all can happen very quickly. The best course of events is to get her spayed at about 6 months of age if she isn’t already.

Ferrets have a scent gland like a skunk with which they can spray. The smell is not nearly as strong or as long lasting as a skunk. I compare it to a human passing gas... really annoying when it happens, but dissipates in about the same time.

Ferrets fed an improper diet will tend to smell worse. The impurities will pass through the ferret’s pores like an old drunk sweats alcohol. Try a high quality ferret food like Totally Ferret, Marshall Farms, or a high quality cat food like Iams or Science Diet.



An often over-looked cause of “smelly” ferrets are dirty ears. Ferrets have thick black ear wax which needs to be cleaned out. Take a cotton swab, and gently twirl inside the ear. Do not try to insert into the ear canal, but clean the outside folds of the ear. (anyone with better directions please send them to me, or

a page I can link to)

### **8. Ferrets must be descented to make good pets.**

Spayed or neutered ferrets have a pretty neutral smell. Some people will be more sensitive than others.

Once a ferret has been fixed, the most effective way of controlling a ferret’s odor is to keep their bedding fresh and clean.

The scent gland itself does not make the ferret smell. A ferret will spray when it is scared or hurt.

I have heard several stories of ferrets being trapped and in trouble, yet not being able to make a sound. My scented ferret was trapped in a chair (bad chair gone now) and

did not make any auditory cry for help. But she screamed an olfactory warning and sprayed profusely. We found her quickly, took to the vet, and now she is once again a healthy, happy ferret.

If a ferret’s scent gland is particularly nasty, it is often a sign of an infected gland, and should be checked out.

### **9. Ferrets should have wood shavings in their cages.**

Ferrets are often confused with what humans know about hamsters and gerbils. I do not know if hamsters need wood shavings, but I absolutely know ferrets do not need wood shavings.

Pine and Cedar wood chips have heavy oils that are very aromatic. Imagine being locked in a small room with twenty women wearing copious amounts of your least favorite perfume. Wood chips have been observed to cause respiratory problems in ferrets.

As bedding, ferrets like old clothes or towels. Hammocks and play tunnels are also appreciated.

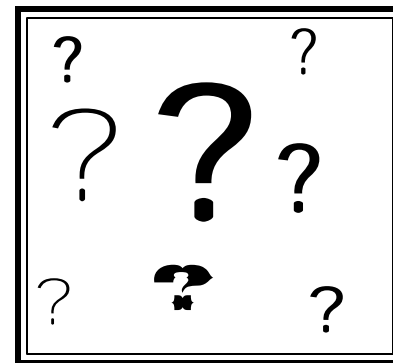
Ferrets should have well ventilated cages and not be kept in old (or new) aquariums. (Once again, try fish).

### **10. Ferrets should be kept outside.**

What part of the first nine did you not understand? Ferrets do not especially smell. Wash their bedding often and there should not be a problem. Do not try to wash your ferret often, because you will strip the oils out of the ferrets coat. Ferrets are not wild. If you do not have room for ferrets inside your house, you should not have ferrets.

Ferrets are very sensitive to temperatures. They are especially sensitive to high heat (80+). Ferrets should be kept inside to protect against heat stroke. Ferrets should have ample bedding for cold nights.

# Top Ten List of Human Misconceptions about Ferrets



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