

Small Animal Conservation As A Gift Idea

You can help wild ferrets, chinchillas and hedgehogs this holiday season.

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Photo courtesy of Prairie Wildlife Research
Adoption kits are available for the black-footed ferret of North America.

With the holiday season fully in swing, small animal lovers might want to focus their seasonal gift-giving on gifts that give back.

Small animals like the black-footed ferret, the wild chinchilla and the wild hedgehog are always in need of supporters who can help the fight for their conservation. Organizations that support these wild small animals are encouraging gift-givers to keep in mind how they can both aid the survival of these creatures and give a gift that any small-animal lover would appreciate.

At the World Wildlife Federation (WWF), "adoption kits" are available for the greater hedgehog of Madagascar and the black-footed ferret of North America, both of which have been threatened primarily by habitat loss and human hunting and encroachment. With the \$50 and \$100 kits including a stuffed plush toy and gift bag or box, the "adoption" of these small animals can help raise awareness of the endangered status of these species and give money back to nonprofits like the WWF.

Other organizations feature similar adoption efforts. For the Black-Footed Ferret Recovery Program, the adopt-a-ferret gift is one that some give. Travis Livieri, executive director of Prairie Wildlife Research, which sponsors the program, said a number of people annually participate in the program because of the direct positive effect they have on the ferrets.

To "adopt," gift-givers can choose from among four black-footed ferrets — three in captivity, and one in the wild. With the \$25, \$50 or \$100 donation, adopters receive regular updates on the status of their chosen ferret, including breeding status, how any babies are doing and whether a release or capture is planned, according to Prairie Wildlife Research. A picture, fact sheet, refrigerator magnet and postcard is also included in every kit. Livieri encourages people to consider the gift idea for any occasion to continue to facilitate the conservation of the species.

"It really gives people a vested interest in that species and that animal specifically," Livieri said. "They want to know how the one they adopted is doing."

For the wild chinchilla of Chile, one can give a simple donation to help restore the chinchilla population as an alternative gift to an adoption program. The chinchilla, which has been hunted for decades by humans for its lush fur, is holding on thanks in part to Save the Wild Chinchillas Inc., which has educated the public on the small animal species since 1996. The nonprofit organization relies primarily on volunteers who need funding in order to go out into the field, and president Amy Deane said that donations that help support these efforts are "most important."

"We need not only donations but people that are willing to travel and help the species in Chile," Deane said.

With donations from the general public a major source of funding for all such organizations, the holidays can be a boost for endangered species whose numbers continue to dwindle.