

Ferret Aging

Do some ferrets age faster than others?

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Posted: October 31, 2008, 11 a.m. EDT

Q: What is the average life span of a ferret? Can it be different depending on their bloodline? I had a ferret live to be 10 years old. Another ferret lived for only 7 years. I have owned ferrets for 15 years, and it seems some age quicker than others. I currently have 10 ferrets of various ages. I've read they live 5 to 7 years on the average, but I've also read 7 to 8 years and, like mine, occasionally 10+ years.

I currently have a tiny female that I have been concerned about. She is 5 years old but acts like she's 90. The veterinarian couldn't find anything wrong with her other than age. She still eats and plays a little, but for the most part she hangs out in her hammock and snoozes. When all the ferrets are out to play, she plays a little then spends most of the time just walking around. Sometimes it seems like her hips are arthritic. She is so tiny and frail; I fear she won't live another year. Is 5 years too young to be so old, or is it an average age for a ferret to seem so feeble?

A: In the United States, most ferrets live to 5 to 7 years of age. Some ferrets live longer, and, rarely, you'll see a ferret in the United States live until 10 or 12. In other countries, reports of older ferrets are more common.

The usual causes of death are heart disease, malignant cancers and renal failure. So, your 5-year-old ferret probably has something that is causing her to show the signs of old age you describe. You need to ask yourself how much you want to spend to find out what that disease is and what happens if the disease can't be treated.

The tests we start out with, besides a physical examination, would include a complete blood count, a biochemistry panel and a urinalysis. If nothing is found on those tests, then we may do whole body radiographs. If still nothing is found and the owner wishes to go further, we may do an ultrasound of the abdomen and chest. It is rare not to find a problem once we have done all of these tests if a ferret is acting the way your ferret is behaving. After all of this testing, the more important question is will we find a disease that we can treat to make your ferret more comfortable?