

10 Common Misconceptions About Pet Ferrets

Explore 10 common misconceptions about pet ferrets that ferret owners and enthusiasts battle against.

By Rebecca Stout

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The Next Buzz On Ferrets

In December's The Buzz On Ferrets column, Rebecca Stout explores the question, "What is the silliest or strangest thing you've ever done for your ferret"? Want to send an answer for her to possibly use? [Click Here>>](#)

The deadline is October 15, 2009

6. Ferrets Can Live Their Life In A Cage

This could not be further from the truth. "[Ferrets] need time out of the cage to play," said Jon Spelbring of Illinois. "Many of the people I've talked to assume that ferrets, like hamsters or rats, should stay in their cages most of the time. Many people, even some ferret owners, don't realize how smart and inquisitive they are. With that intelligence comes a need for stimulation — play."

Just like any other living being, ferrets enjoy the outdoors. But be aware, you cannot turn them loose outside and expect them to come back. Before taking your ferret outdoors, make sure its shots are up to date and that it is well protected from outside pests.

7. Ferrets Don't Require Veterinary Care

What shots, you ask? You were told that your baby ferret had already been given shots and that it would rarely need veterinary care? Kiss those myths goodbye. Ferrets need regularly scheduled rabies and distemper shots, as well as checkups from a veterinarian. In addition, ferrets also need to be protected from fleas, ticks, heartworm and other parasites, just like a dog or cat.

8. Ferrets Have Potty Habits Like A Cat

Many people believe that ferrets will use a litter box just like a cat. That is only partially true. Yes, ferrets do use litter boxes. Some ferrets are good at it too. But some ferrets miss the box quite a bit. That is just a reality of owning a ferret.

Another reality is that ferrets potty frequently, sometimes every two hours. Possibly that is one of the reasons some people believe they are dirty. "Ferrets are very clean creatures," said Anne Kaelber of Arizona. "They don't like to poop in messy spots, so they continually find clean spots to go in. The cleaner the spot they like is, the less likely they are to find a new spot!"

9. Ferrets Stink!

Possibly the most annoying myth to ferret lovers is that ferrets stink. Alexandra Busch of Kentucky thinks it is the most misunderstood thing about ferrets. "People seem to think that it's like having an animal that's been sprayed by a skunk running around your home," she said.

Ferrets do have a unique odor that is unlike any other pet. Because it is alien to most people, it can be interpreted as being a bad smell. But they might think the same about a dog if they had never been around one before.

Ferret odor is very easy to control by frequently changing their bedding, feeding them a high-quality diet, cleaning their ears and bathing them every few months.

10. Ferrets Bite And Are Mean!

This is one of the most common and negative myths surrounding ferrets, but this stereotype does have a tiny grain of truth.

Ferrets use their mouths as much as a human baby. Because of their high intelligence and curiosity, ferrets seek out information in any way they can by using every sense and physical tool available. This is how they explore their environment, stimulate their brain and gather knowledge. The belief that ferrets are vicious biters probably emanates from this behavior, coupled with the perception that their teeth are large in proportion to the size of their heads. Their teeth are actually smaller than a kitten's, and their actual bite strength is not anything unusual.

Fear can lead people to leap from one assumption to another. The strangest of all rumors about ferrets is the notion that they eat babies. In fact, ferrets are far less likely to bite than a dog, cat, rabbit or even a person. Dogs are five times more likely to bite, and their bite is far more damaging. The press loves to sensationalize those rare instances when ferrets bit children. No baby should be left unattended with any type of pet, doing so poses great danger to both the baby and the pet.

So, ferret enthusiasts, if you hear people spouting a barrage of offensive or silly “facts” about ferrets, keep calm and work to peel away the myths, rumors and misunderstandings. Afterward, everyone will see our old friend, the ferret. And ferrets are by far more exciting and marvelous than any animal people might forge from misconceptions.

Rebecca Stout resides in rural Tennessee with her husband, two sons and beloved pets. Ferrets have been in her heart and life for 30 years. She enjoys writing, photography, animals and being a strong advocate for her autistic son.

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