

10 Common Misconceptions About Pet Ferrets

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

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People believe many misconceptions about ferrets, mainly because ferrets aren't well-known pets like dogs and cats.

People familiar with ferrets know at least some of the wild misconceptions about ferrets. And many ferret enthusiasts are weary of the constant battle they fight to dispel such misconceptions. The best weapons in this fight? Remaining calm and focusing on educating others about ferrets. Also, keeping an open mind. Some stereotypes don't just come out of thin air, but originate from a grain of truth.

What are these misconceptions? Let's explore 10 common ones.

1. Ferrets Are Rodents

People commonly think ferrets are rodents that are very closely related to rats. "I get a lot of calls where people have come into contact with wild weasels here. People don't know the difference," said Robin Jones, a ferret owner and rescuer. "And many people just flat don't know what ferrets are period. I get asked, 'What kind of animal is that?'"

People mistake ferrets for many things, such as large rats, weasels and, my personal favorite, baby wolverines. Ferret people are mischievous and often fight the urge to joke around and make up their own ridiculous names. I've had a giggle or two referring to them as very rare Polish cats while trying to break the ice with people who ask what the long, furry thing in my arms is. The joke being that ferrets are likely a descendant of the European polecat.

2. Ferrets Are Wild

Ferrets can be wild animals, but not wild in the sense that they are untamed and undomesticated. They are wild in the good sense of the word, meaning they are outrageously fun, active, acrobatic, little balls of chaos. They are no doubt God's little clowns.

The domestic ferret, *Mustela furo*, is and never was found in the wild. Domestic ferrets cannot survive outdoors for very long, because they lack the instincts and skills to do so. In addition, they can succumb to extreme cold, while higher temperatures (above 85 degrees Fahrenheit) can be deadly to them.

3. Ferrets Are Nocturnal

Ferrets are not nocturnal, they are crepuscular (most active during dawn and dusk), but they do sleep a lot. Domestic ferrets have been bred over the centuries to be good companion animals for people and are right at home fitting into our daily lives.

4. Ferrets Carry Rabies

As often is the case, some people fear the unknown, which can lead to jumping to some pretty outrageous conclusions. I have come across people who assume ferrets carry all sorts of disease. However, this simply is not true.

Phyllis Spy, president of Massachusetts Ferret Friends, a ferret club and rescue, reports that there is a widespread belief that ferrets are carriers of rabies. The fact is that ferrets are unlikely to become infected and are very poor carriers of the disease. Rabies is only transferred through saliva from a bite that punctures the skin. Ferrets usually die from the disease before it can shed in their saliva. You'll be happy to know that there has never been a recorded incident of a person contracting rabies from a ferret.

5. It's OK To Feed Any Food To Ferrets

Unfortunately, the belief that a ferret can eat pretty much anything or live on rabbit or dog food can prove to be extremely harmful to ferrets. Donna Spirito, a ferret shelter operator and co-founder of The Educated Ferret Association in Massachusetts, said that people often tell her that they feed their ferrets fruits, vegetables, chocolate, candy, soda, raisins and more. "[People think] it is OK to give it to them, because they like it," Spirito said.

Every single item on that list is unhealthy for a ferret and some of them can be fatal. Ferrets are obligate carnivores. This means their gastrointestinal system is specialized for digesting meat and is unable to digest vegetable protein. Death due to an intestinal blockage from fruit or veggie consumption is excruciatingly long and painful. In fact, a ferret can become extremely unhealthy and be at risk of dying just from not eating kibble that is high enough in protein. Ferret food should be at least 36 percent animal protein; however, a higher percentage is better.

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