

Being A Ferret Breeder

Things to Consider

It is extremely important to learn the facts and possible consequences in advance if you are contemplating breeding ferrets. Remember that you are dealing with living, breathing, feeling, intelligent creatures and you must make all decisions with their welfare in mind.

Most ferrets, even show winners, should never be bred. Many ferrets, though wonderful pets, have defects of structure, personality, or health that should not be replicated. Breeding animals should be as free of these defects as possible. Breeding should only be done with the goal of improving the species.

If done correctly, breeding ferrets does not make you money. General health care, vaccinations, food, litter, toys, facilities, time, advertising, etc., are all costly and must be paid before the kits can be sold. An unexpected Caesarean or emergency care for an ill kit will make a break-even litter become a big liability.

First-time breeders have no reputation and no referrals to help them find buyers for their kits. You may have to pay for the expense of caring for kits that may not sell until six months, one year, or longer. What would you do if your kits did not sell? Dump them on a shelter? Sell them cheaply to an animal broker who may resell them to pet stores, labs, or other unsatisfactory buyers? Experienced breeders with good reputations do not consider a breeding unless they have cash deposits in advance of an average-sized litter or, at the very least, a waiting list. You must be prepared to keep every life you create.

Remember the birth may be at 3:00 a.m. at the veterinarian's office on the



These kits are about five days old.

surgery table. With every chance of a good delivery, there is the chance of a bad one. You may see the birth of a healthy kit or a kit born dead or with gross deformities that require euthanasia. Some jills are not keen on motherhood and either ignore or devour their kits. Jills can have severe delivery problems or even die during birth. It is important that you fully understand this risk before you breed your beloved jill.

Breeders of quality ferrets spend well over 150 hours raising an average litter. That is over two hours per day, every day for 10 weeks. The jill should not be left alone while delivering in case there are any complications. Your veterinarian must be a phone call away in those cases, and emergency procedures are usually expensive. Be prepared for days off work and sleepless nights. Even after delivery, the mother needs care and proper feeding. Kits need daily checking, weighing, socialization, feeding and, later, grooming and nip training, and the cage needs lots and lots of cleaning. More hours are spent doing

paperwork and pedigrees and interviewing buyers. If you have any abnormal conditions, such as ill kits or a jill that cannot or will not care for her kits, count on double the time. If you cannot provide the time, you will have either dead kits or poor ones that are bad-tempered, antisocial, dirty, and/or sickly—hardly a buyer's dream.

There are hundreds of thousands of unwanted ferrets in shelters. Many of these ferrets are privately bred with pedigree papers. A breeder who creates a life is responsible for that life. Will you carefully screen potential buyers? Or, alternately, will you just take the money and not worry if the ferret goes to irresponsible owners? Will you not think about the possibility of that kit you once held and loved being injured, ignored, or facing owners that no longer "have time" for it any more? Would you be prepared to take back a ferret if the owners can no longer care for it? Or can you live with the thought that the baby you

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helped bring into the world will be in a shelter looking for a new home?

Responsible breeders make a lifetime commitment to the well-being and improvement of the species. They have studied and researched the species and know its history, correct conformational standards, strong points, and drawbacks. Good breeders have spent time, effort, and money obtaining their breeding stock. Those breeders plan a litter only with the goal of the offspring being better than the parents—not for profit. Conscience breeders put the animals' health and well-being over the ability to reproduce. High-quality breeders have both the time and mental ability to care for the jill and kits. They evaluate their litters and make every effort to match kit to buyer in temperament, attitude, and personality.

Accountable breeders do not have so many ferrets that there is no time for individual attention, play, and grooming. These breeders do not skimp on food quality, space, preventive medicine, and health care. Ethical breeders assume responsibility for the life created

by carefully screening buyers, helping find new homes, making a comfortable life for the retirees, and being able to make the decision to euthanize when a kit born with a problem has no chance for a quality life. First-rate breeders build good reputations slowly, based on education and consistent quality and not on volume, advertising, or from casual or self-glorifying attitude. These breeders go further and assume responsibility for the problems of the species as a whole: they belong to an organization for ferrets, they continue

to read about new developments in ferret health care, and they work to reduce the number of ferrets that are carelessly bred, ill cared for, and discarded. Superior breeders can look at a bigger picture than show ribbons or kit sales and contributes in some way to the betterment of ferrets as a whole.

If being responsible for the lives you create is not feasible then, please, do the responsible thing and neuter your pet. Leave breeding to those who have committed themselves to that purpose.

Kits need plenty of human interaction and playtime for their health and development. Top: 6-week-old hob. Bottom: 3-week-old kits.

