

# Recovery of the Black-Footed Ferret

## MORE PROGRESS...AND HOW YOU CAN HELP!

By Travis Livieri, Prairie Wildlife Research

The black-footed ferret recovery program is a multi-national effort shared by many agencies, organizations, Indian tribes, zoos and land-owners. The program achieved important progress in 2007.

Captive breeding facilities at the Toronto Zoo, Louisville Zoo, National Zoo, Phoenix Zoo, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and the NBFFCC (National Black-Footed Ferret Conservation Center) experienced a banner year, producing nearly 400 kits. In addition, new wilderness reintroduction sites were added. Ferrets were released for the first time in Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota and on private lands in Kansas, including lands owned by the Nature Conservancy. The Kansas release came nearly 50 years after the last confirmed specimen in the state. A spring survey found a 42 percent survival rate, with five litters of kits expected to be born this summer. Wind Cave in South Dakota will offer public night tours for people

interested in seeing black-footed ferrets in the wild. Tours can be arranged by phoning Visitor Information at 605-745-4600.

In other states in 2007, the private lands of Espee Ranch near Flagstaff, Ariz., became that state's second black-footed ferret reintroduction site. In Montana, a fourth reintroduction site was established at the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, with the release attracting large numbers of tribal members and schoolchildren.

In total, black-footed ferrets have now been reintroduced in seven states (Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota, Arizona, Utah, Colorado and Kansas) and in Mexico.

In 2008, reintroductions will be carried out for the first time in New Mexico and at new sites in Colorado and Utah.

Planned future reintroduction sites include the Turner Endangered Species Fund lands in New Mexico and the Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan, Canada, where a release is expected in 2009. With each new reintroduction, we move another step closer to a lasting recovery of the black-footed ferret. Our estimate as of January 2008 is that there are now more than 1,000 black-footed ferrets in the wild, with substantial populations in South Dakota, Wyoming and Arizona.

### Getting Counts Is Tough Work!

Supporters of the black-footed ferret recovery effort may not be aware of the considerable time and difficulty required to count or estimate

the number of these animals in the wild. For instance, in Conata Basin, S.D., the Prairie Wildlife Research and its partners must spend the months from August to November in the field to count a population of approximately 300 black-footed ferrets. Each site imposes its own tough challenges. Some, for example, are in rough terrain, wilderness areas or national parks, where travel is restricted to foot traffic only.

### You Can Help the Recovery Effort

There are several ways you, too, can help with black-footed ferret recovery. First, you can visit zoos and facilities that display these animals, and let them know you've come to see black-footed ferrets. There are many such places across the country. Find out where they are by going to [www.prairiewildlife.org](http://www.prairiewildlife.org) on the web and looking under "FAQs."

Second, since you probably talk to everyone you know about your own ferrets, take that opportunity to also talk up black-footed ferrets and the prairie dogs they need to survive. Domestic ferret owners can be the best ambassadors for their wild cousins.

And finally, adopt a black-footed ferret (while leaving him in the wild, of course). Adoptions can make a great gift for ferret-loving friends, and the funds go directly to black-footed ferret recovery. Moreover, with these adoptions, no one has to clean any litter boxes. What a deal! Visit [www.prairiewildlife.org](http://www.prairiewildlife.org) to adopt online, or write Prairie Wildlife Research, P.O. Box 308, Wellington, Colo. 80549.

See the black-footed ferret alert on page 23.



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