



American Ferret Association, Inc.

Ferret Breed Standard

POSITION STATEMENT: The **AFA Ferret Breed Standard** has been developed to promote the breeding of healthy ferrets who conform to the structure of what the ferret was meant to be. Anything outside the 'norm' is discouraged as is the selective breeding of traits that are not normally found in the species *Mustela [putorius] furo*.

GENERAL: Almost certainly domesticated from the European Polecat (*Mustela putorius*), the ferret is well-adapted to its burrow invading and dwelling niche wherein the animal chases, captures, and kills prey that can be, in some cases, many times its size. As a result, the ferret's musculo-skeletal anatomy is characterized by two outstanding features: its strength and its flexibility.

Overall, the body's skeletal frame is remarkably elongated, gaining its length from extraordinarily long vertebrae (particularly those of the cervical and lumbar regions of the spine). The legs, in contrast, are especially shortened to accommodate access to burrows and tunnels.

In order to support the elongated frame and to capture, kill, and carry prey in a subterranean environment, the ferret has developed a phenomenal musculature, displaying strength disproportionate to its size.

If the robust frame and muscles were not enough, the ferret is also a master of flexibility. Driven by the confines of its hunting and dwelling environment, the ferret's skeletal system (notably the spine, sternum, wrists, and ankles) have evolved to permit contortions worthy of Houdini.

Together, the skeletal and muscle systems of the ferret comprise an animal admired for both its power and its elasticity.

When evaluating one of our domestic companions, keep in mind the following four factors that can have substantive effects on both skeletal frame and muscle tone/condition.

- ◆ **BREEDING:** Unlike our domestic ferret's wild cousins (*M. putorius*), the domestic ferret is a product of human selection more so than natural selection. Humans can select for characteristics that may or may not be desirable were the ferret to be in a wild population. Reputable breeders are mindful of breeding for genetically sound characteristics and should always breed for physical characteristics that are consistent with *M. putorius*.
- ◆ **ALTERING:** Neutering or spaying a ferret changes his or her physiology. If a ferret is altered before maturity, he or she will display a different growth pattern than a ferret who is either unaltered or altered after maturity. Early altered ferrets possess somewhat less bone mass and density than late alters or unaltered ferrets. Even more so, they will exhibit less muscle mass due to the removal of the steroids responsible for muscle growth. Ferrets who are altered after maturity will lose some muscle mass, but are still often more muscularly robust than early alters.
- ◆ **DIET:** The vast majority of domestic ferrets are fed a kibble diet. Even the optimal commercially produced food is manufactured simply to meet most ferret's dietary needs, but it is very unlikely to exceed them by much. Factors such as growth, illness, stress, an active lifestyle, etc. can raise a ferret's dietary needs beyond the capabilities of the average kibble diet. In response, the ferret may eat a larger quantity of the kibble to satisfy a particular dietary need. The result can be that the ferret exceeds its dietary needs of another food element. The end product can be an overweight ferret, a ferret lacking proper muscle mass or tone, or a ferret displaying abnormal bone development.

- ◆ **EXERCISE:** Most ferrets are caged for their own safety and for their owner's convenience. While some caging may be necessary, over-caging and a lack of stimulating exercise can lead to a loss of muscle mass. In turn, the decreased muscle mass may, over time lead to a deterioration of the bone mass. Other factors aside, ferrets will naturally maintain muscle tone that is commensurate with the amount of exercise that they receive.

HEAD SHAPE: The basic shape of the head should be triangular - broad between the ears tapering towards the muzzle in an elliptical shape. The profile should be straight without a facial bump in hobs and may have a very slight bump at the plane of the eyes in jills.

- ◆ **BULLDOG STYLE HEAD:** The ideal shape of an intact or late neutered ferret's head that exhibits a bulldog style is a rounded equilateral triangle. This means that the width of the head and the length of the head from the tip of the nose to the start of the ears, are equal. The length and width should be equal and the depth should be at least 90% of the length or width.
- ◆ **STANDARD STYLE HEAD:** The ideal shape of an intact or late neutered ferret's head that exhibits a standard style is a small amount longer than it is wide. The length can be up to 10% longer than the width. Any more than this, the head is too long. The depth of the standard style head should be at least 85% of the width of the ferret's head.

In both styles of head, the muzzle should be at least 55% of the width of the head, but not more than 70%. Either the bulldog style or the standard style head are proper conformation and neither is preferred over the other.

EARS: The ears should sit squarely at the top rear portion of the skull in an even line with each other. They should be round in shape and proportional to the head size and gender of the ferret.

EYES: Eye should be large and rounded with even pigment dispersion allowing for the iris and pupil. The eyes should be placed equidistant from the ears and the nose and be in an even line with each other.

NOSE: The nose should be triangular in shape with evenly placed nostrils. To check the alignment of the head, check that the midpoint line of the nose lines up with a straight line drawn from a mid-point between the ears with no deviation to the left or right. Another method to check that the head is even and straight is to turn the ferret onto its back and look at it from the underside. The line that runs from the nose down to the mouth should be exactly straight with no deviations to either side.

MOUTH: Teeth and jaws should meet so that the canines, upper and lower, meet snugly and evenly with the upper canines fitting behind the lower canines.

NECK AND SHOULDERS: The neck should be straight and relatively short. The shoulder blades should be flat and well angulated at an approximate 45° angle with no protrusions. They should be far enough apart from side to side for the proper size and width of the ferret.

RIBS: The rib cage ideally should be symmetrical, deep and well sprung to allow sufficient heart and lung room. There should be no protrusions or noticeable angles on the ribs or the breastbone (sternum). The shape of the rib cage is nearly round. All of the rib bones should come down from the spine in a smooth curved shape and end in a smooth even manner so that no knobs or protrusions are present.

There are allowances for size differences, especially between hobs and jills and between intact, late altered and early altered ferrets.

SPINE: The spine must be supple and straight with no noticeable protrusions. The arch of the spine should be a smooth curve and should be centered between the shoulders and the hips.

HIPS: The pelvis should be a size that would make the hip joints well spaced from side to side and should be symmetrical without any bony prominence. They need to be adequate size and thickness to support the ferret's size and ideal weight. The size of the pelvis should be an appropriate size for the ferret and should match in size to the rib cage. The hip joint should not be too loose.

LEGS: The legs of the ferret should be an appropriate length and width for the size of the ferret and should be symmetrical between the left and right limbs. The legs should not be bowed.

FEET: The feet should have five (5) toes each and should be sized in proportion to the body structure. They should be round in overall ground covering capability without excessive splaying or camping of toes.

TAIL: The tail should be straight and flexible for its entire length and should be approximately one-third (1/3) the entire body length (nose to base of tail). No kinks, fuses, or protrusions should be present.

BONE DENSITY: Bone density is a very important part of the skeletal structure. The bones of a ferret should be strong, thick and dense enough to support the ferret's healthy body mass. The bone density of an intact or late neutered ferret should be considerable and should have a healthy, solid feel.

MUSCLE STRUCTURE AND TONE: Ferrets should exhibit a firm, solid feel to the muscles - not flabbiness, which would indicate fat, not muscle. Hobs should have heavier muscle development overall, especially in the head (jowls), neck, chest and shoulders (secondary male characteristics). A ferret that shows more muscle coverage than is average for their age or sex, is a positive trait unless it is outside the scope of what a ferret should have. The ribs, shoulders, neck and hips should have a good, firm feel, showing muscle development in these areas. Abdomens should be firm, not pendulous.

Breeder ferrets show a denser muscle mass than the altered ferret. Altered ferrets will exhibit less muscle tone, especially if they were altered early (prior to 12 weeks of age). Later alters should exhibit more muscle tone and mass than the early alters. Overall, the ferret should feel firm - not mushy.

The ferret may show a little less muscle bulk as well as fat when in their summer weight as opposed to winter weight. One is not to be preferred over the other. Both should be solid and have a 'well exercised' feel.

BODY PROPORTIONS: The ferret should present an overall symmetry of body. Both sides, left and right, should be even in length, width, and bulk. Front and hind feet should point squarely forward. Head, neck, body, legs, feet and tail should all be proportional. The ferret should stand square and balanced on all four feet with the hind legs under the body. The top line should be smooth with the spine curving evenly from mid back to rump. The highest point of the flexed spine should be half-way between the shoulders and hips (not the dock of the tail). Leg length should be proportionate to the body length.

Weight should be evenly dispersed over the body. If the ferret is held at mid-point of body, it should feel equal in weight on both ends.

OVERALL HEALTH AND MAINTENANCE: The manner in which a ferret is cared for throughout the year plays a significant role in the development of a healthy attitude, as well as a healthy body and coat.

A ferret that receives sufficient exercise will have a firm layer of muscle cover through which its bones may be palpated, but through which bones do not protrude.

Obesity is not a common occurrence in ferrets, though it can happen when an owner feeds too much fat and/or protein to a ferret who should be on a lower calorie diet. A light layer of fat is normal in a healthy active ferret.

A healthy ferret will have a thick, glossy coat whether it is a summer coat or a winter coat. The winter coat should be long, luxurious and soft to the touch. The summer coat will have little undercoat, but should be soft and silky to the touch. Hairs should not be coarse, dry, or break off if bent. The ferret's whiskers should be long and unbroken, not brittle.

The ferret's teeth should be white. Older ferret's teeth will have first an off color that proceeds to an obvious translucence.

The eyes should be bright and alert, the nose moist, not dry or chafed. A ferret with dull eyes and dry nose is not a healthy ferret.

DISPOSITION: A good disposition is an important attribute of any ferret. The ferret should be alert, inquisitive, playful, affectionate and calm while being handled. Altered ferrets should be exceptionally amenable to being handled. Breeder ferrets should be given some consideration due to the effect their hormone level may have on their behavior. Hobs in full season are prone to being very fidgety. While this is not a desirable trait, it is a worse offense if committed by an altered ferret without the excuse of raging hormones.

In general, fidgety behavior is not desirable. However, adolescents who are 6 months of age or younger are more inclined to be fidgety.

FERRET COLOR STANDARDS

The following color standards refer to the color of the points (legs, shoulders, tail and mask, if present) and body color.

ALBINO:

- Guard Hairs - white to cream, with white preferable.
- Undercoat - white to cream, with white preferable.
- Eyes - ruby red only.
- Nose - pink only.

BLACK:

- Guard Hairs - true black in color.
- Undercoat - preferred is white, but a slight golden hue is acceptable.
- Eyes - black or near black.
- Nose - preferred is black or near black. Speckled black is acceptable.

BLACK SABLE:

- Guard Hairs - dark ash blackish brown with no warm brown tone with noticeable black glossy shine.
- Undercoat - preferred is a white to cream, but not yellow.
- Eyes - dark brown or near black.
- Nose - preferred is solid blackish brown. Mottled or heavy speckled blackish brown is acceptable.

CHAMPAGNE:

- Guard Hairs - tan or diluted version of chocolate.
- Undercoat - preferred is a white to cream, but not yellow.
- Eyes - light to dark burgundy to dark brown.
- Nose - preferred is beige, pink, or pink with a beige or light brown 'T' outline.

CHOCOLATE:

- Guard Hairs - warm milk chocolate brown.
- Undercoat - preferred is white, but a slight golden hue is acceptable.
- Eyes - brown is preferred, dark burgundy is acceptable.
- Nose - preferred is pink, beige, or pink with light brown 'T' outline. A brick nose color is acceptable.

DARK-EYED WHITE:

- Guard Hairs - white to cream, with white preferable.
- Undercoat - white to cream, with white preferable.
- Eyes - burgundy.
- Nose - pink only.

SABLE:

- Guard Hairs - warm deep brown.
- Undercoat - preferred is a white to cream or light golden, but not yellow.
- Eyes - brown or near black.
- Nose - preferred is light brown, speckled/mottled brown, or brown 'T' outline.

FERRET PATTERN STANDARDS

GENERAL INFORMATION: Each of the above colors may have white feet (mitts) and white patches under the neck (bibs). If mitts are present, a bib must be present also. Mitts should be even and clearly defined. The front mitts should be even in comparison to each other and the hind mitts should also be even in comparison to each other. The front mitts may or may not be even with the hind mitts.

SOLID: This pattern may be present in any of the colors listed above. The percentage of colored guard hairs should be ideally 100% in relation to white guard hairs which should be realistically 0% in the body and points. This pattern gives an appearance of solid color concentration from the head to the tail. Masks are full or 'T' bar masks ('T' bar masks preferred). This pattern may exhibit with mitts and bib.

STANDARD: This pattern may be present in any of the colors listed above. The percentage of colored guard hairs should be ideally 100% in relation to white guard hairs but the color concentration is not as heavy as in the Solid pattern. The body will appear lighter in color (concentration) and the points will be easily discernible. Masks can be full or 'T' bar masks (full masks preferred). This pattern may exhibit with mitts and bib.

COLOR POINT (SIAMESE): This pattern may be present in any of the colors listed above. The point pattern will show a distinct difference in color concentration between the body color and the points. The mask must be a thin 'V' mask for black, black sable, sable, champagne and chocolate, not a full or 'T' bar mask. Champagnes and fine points may have a thin 'V' mask or no mask with the 'V' mask preferred. The nose color should be lighter than the above stated nose colors meaning pink, beige, or 'T' outline.

BLAZE: This pattern may be present in any of the colors listed above. There must be a long white blaze (1/2" to 3/4" in width) from the top of the head (above the eyes and below the ears) down the back of the neck, minimum 2/3 the way down. Eyes should be varying shades of ruby to brown. The nose should be pink or pink with a light outline. Knee patches may be present and front feet should have white tips or mitts as should the hind feet. A white tip on the tail is acceptable. Masks will vary depending on color concentration. Minor color rings around the eyes and small masks are acceptable. Full masks are not acceptable. Bibs, white or speckled bellies, and roaning is also acceptable.

PANDA: This pattern may be present in any of the colors listed above. The preferred Panda should have an almost completely white head. A darker concentration of color is expected across the shoulders and the hips. Eyes should be varying shades of burgundy. The nose should be pink or pink with a light outline. Knee patches may be present and mitts should be present on all four feet. A white tip on the tail is acceptable. Small color rings or patches around the eyes are preferred and small color markings in front of the ears are acceptable. Masks of any kind are not acceptable. White or speckled bellies and roaning are acceptable.

ROAN: This pattern may be present in any of the colors listed above. The degree of roaning will determine the color/pattern category. If there are 40% to 60% of white guard hairs present (body and points only), the pattern will be 'roan'. If there are 90% white guard hairs, the pattern is Dark-eyed White Pattern. The colored guard hairs should be evenly sprinkled throughout the body.

DARK-EYED WHITE PATTERN: This pattern may be present in any of the colors listed above. The preferred Dark-Eyed White Pattern should have a minimum of 90% white guard hairs with either a sprinkling of colored guard hairs throughout the body, or colored spots and/or a colored stripe.