

Victorian Ferret Society Inc



Information booklet

Victorian Ferret Society



MONTHLY MEETINGS of the Victorian Ferret Society are held on the second Friday of each month.

Except January.

Venue: Scout Hall, Birch Street, South Caulfield. 7.30pm

NB: When the temperature is above 30 degrees Celsius please do not bring your ferrets to meetings.





WHO ARE WE? WHAT DO WE DO?

We are an incorporated association, consisting of people who respect animals—particularly ferrets.

We have members in many suburbs of Melbourne and in country towns throughout Victoria.

VFS members may act as ferret rescuers and carers; fund raisers, educators, teachers, and welfare officers.

The VFS liaises with ferret societies in all Australian States, and has contact with ferret owners and researchers in Great Britain, Europe and America



The aims of the Victorian Ferret Society are



- * The welfare of Ferrets – to promote the correct care of ferrets.
- * To educate the general public in all facets of ferret husbandry.
- * To care for and re-home discarded, lost & unwanted ferrets & re-home those whose owners can not be found.
- * To protect the working ferret.
- * To ensure that ferrets for sale are in a healthy condition at the time of sale.
- * To provide interactive venues for ferret owners & enthusiasts.
- * To provide a friendly meeting place for visitors, members & ferrets

History of Ferrets

Ferrets belong to the Mustelid family they are descended from the European Polecat; and are related to the weasel, mink, otter, skunk, badger & others of this line.



Ferrets are a true domestic species, being dependent on man for survival; Ferrets have been domesticated for over 3000 years & are documented as having traveled with the Roman army through Europe & Britain. Originally ferrets were tamed to hunt small rodents and rabbits but they are now becoming popular as

companion pets. Ferrets are the 3rd most popular pet in America only behind cat's & dogs. This trend is now becoming obvious in Australia. Ferrets are good pets where space is limited (eg. Flats & units) Ferrets are excellent pets & can be easily trained to use a litter tray.

Allergy sufferers should note ferrets are a low allergenic animal.

In Australia, ferrets do not pose any threat of becoming feral, this is mainly due to the hot climate, but also they are easy prey for larger animals. (Feral dogs, cats foxes) In New Zealand & parts of Europe; ferrets are a feral animal due to the environment & cooler climate & interbreeding with other species.

Male ferrets are called HOBBS and females are called JILLS. Young ferrets are called KITS and a group of ferrets are called a BUSINESS.

Ferrets are carnivores therefore they are meat eaters.

What to look for in a healthy ferret



- >Dry or slightly moist nose.
- >Bright, clear eyes.
- >Clean teeth.
- >Supple, elongated abdomen with no lumps.
- >Smooth, glistening coat.
- >Curious & playful.
- >Clean feet & nails.



General Ferret points

- * Male ferrets tend to be larger than Female ferrets.
- * Males weigh on average 1kg to 2kg.
- * Females weigh on average 0.5 kg to 1kg.
- * Ferrets are sexually mature at 4-8months.
- * Ferrets do not breed like rabbits.
- * Average life span of a ferret is 6-8 years.
- * Ferrets are very inquisitive & will explore wherever they can.
- * Ferrets require a safe secure place to live they will sleep up to 20hrs a day.



There are four basic colours of ferrets other colours are variations of these.

Colours

- * Sable (black, brown & cream markings with dark eye mask)
- * Dark Eyed White (White with black,brown & dark burgundy eyes)
- * Albino (White with Red eyes due to lack of Pigment)
- * Silver / Cinnamon (Dark grey and silver/ reddish tinge)

How to assist keeping your ferret happy & healthy

- * *Regular exercise. At least 1- 2hours per day.*
- * *Vet checks as required.*
- * *Grooming (trim nails clean teeth & ears).*
- * *Provide fresh food & water daily.*
- * *Avoid exposure to humans with cold or flue like symptoms.*
- * *Keep enclosure & bedding clean. Clean a minimum of once a week.*
- * *When not at home have an enclosure to keep your ferrets safe.*
- * *Have toys and pipes available for your ferret to play with.*



Things to avoid

- ▽ Table scraps & sweets.
- ▽ Large amounts of fruit, NO sugared fruits eg sultanas & raisins.
- ▽ Rubber toys.
- ▽ Foam / Polystyrene.
- ▽ Fabrics that can fray easily.
- ▽ Hot weather above 30 degrees.
- ▽ Keeping your ferrets under artificial light (ie. Fluro tubes).



(This may bring your entire ferrets into Season early)



A large number of plants are also toxic to ferrets so if your ferrets have access to plants please be aware of the following & many others:

- * Lilies
- * Cyclamen
- * Sago Palms
- * Tulips
- * Azaleas /Rhododendrons
- * Oleander
- * Chrysanthemums
- * English Ivy





Diet & feeding



Ferrets are obligatory Carnivores who depend primarily on meat protein & fats to satisfy their dietary requirements. The protein in the diet needs to be of high quality and easily digestible. Ferrets have a very short digestive tract therefore a rapid digestive system.

The Diet should be made up of a high quality dry ferret food or kitten food. The dry food needs to contain at least 32% Animal protein. Fat content ideally between 18 – 22 % Carbohydrates as low as possible 8-10%, Grains & corn to be avoided.

As ferrets are carnivores fresh meat is recommended. (Beef, Rabbit, Chicken) Also feeding your ferrets raw chicken wings & necks will help with cleaning their teeth.



Some owners choose to feed their ferrets a whole food diet. This mainly consists of day old chicks & mice.

These small animals are frozen & thawed when needed.

This type of food must only be purchased from a recognized supplier.

Please Note that no live animals are permitted to be fed to a ferret.

“Warning about Bread & Milk”



In the past ferret owners used to feed a diet of bread & milk to their ferrets.

Ferrets are lactose intolerant and are unable to digest carbohydrates; therefore neither milk nor bread should form part of their diet. Ferrets tend to develop diarrhoea when they ingest these substances.

Pet milks or lactose free milk may be given to your ferret, but it is not an essential part of their nutritional needs.

If you decide to give you ferrets pet milk or Lactose free milk only give it in small amounts, as an occasional treat.

Food Treats for ferrets

Ferrets are very fond of food; their favourite foods can be given as treats and as rewards for particular behaviour (great for training your ferret).

Things which are suitable for treats include, small amounts of :

- * Nutrigel or Nutripet;
- * Lactose free milk, special ferret treats;
- * Ferretone drops;
- * Some soft fruits (not sultanas or Raisins);

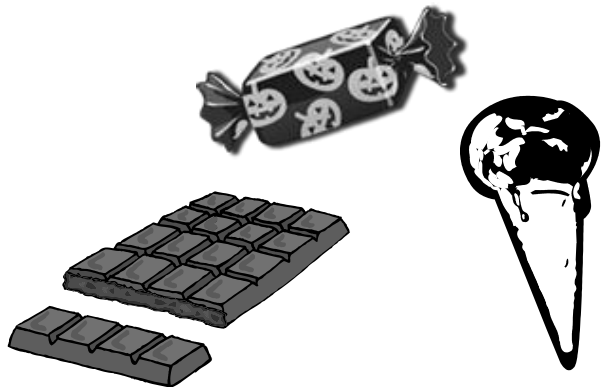


Any food which fits in with their dietary requirements can be given.

**Fresh water must be available
at all times.**

Warning Do Not Give the Following

- * Ice-cream,
- * Chocolates,
- * Lollies,
- * Nuts,
- * Sultanas,
- * Raisons,
- * Hard Fruits,



Housing



Ferrets need an enclosure which is regularly cleaned, water- proof, draught proof in winter and cool in summer. A sleeping area is required with bedding material. Woolen blankets, old clothing or shredded paper. Bedding must not be damp or soiled as ferrets need warm place to sleep.

Do not use straw, hay or sawdust as this can cause respiratory problems or eye trauma & skin irritations.

Ferrets require at least 0.7 square meters of floor space per ferret. Housing must be secure so that they cannot escape. If a ferret can squeeze it's head a through hole their entire body will follow. Ferrets are very inquisitive creatures, they like to explore and climb, so if you can have multiple levels set up in the enclosure it will make it more interesting for them.



*Please note if buying or building a wooden enclosure
Please do not use treated pine as this timber contains
chemicals that can be harmful to ferrets.*

Housing

CLEAN FOOD & WATER BOWLS ARE REQUIRED AT ALL TIMES.

Ferrets are easily trained to use a kitty litter tray.

Litter tray – high backed, corner trays or rectangular trays with high sides and a lower entrance.

Litter types to use - avoid those which clump, those which form dust, and any litter which can cause your ferret respiratory distress.

Ferrets need mental stimulation so toys are recommended. Paper bags, hard plastic toys. PVC piping is a good thing for them to play with as they like to run through them.



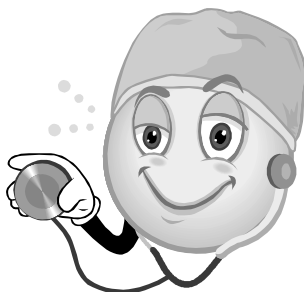
Please avoid:

Rubber products as the ferrets will chew on them and may swallow small pieces which can lead to gastric problems & digestive system blockages.

Common Health Problems

Ferrets can be prone to the following illnesses:

- ▽ Sarcoptic Mange
- ▽ Gastrointestinal disorders
- ▽ Tumors
- ▽ Influenza
- ▽ Trauma
- ▽ Dermatitis
- ▽ Ear-mites
- ▽ Heartworm
- ▽ Distemper
- ▽ Dental issues
- ▽ Heat stress
- ▽ Inflammatory Bowel Disorders
- ▽ Adrenal Disease



Distemper



Ferrets like dogs can pick up canine Distemper. If this disease is contracted by your ferret it will most likely be fatal .

The VFS recommend that you have your ferrets vaccinated with canine Distemper vaccination. The injection is only a small % of a canine dose.

Your ferret knowledgeable vet will know the dosage required & frequency.



Ear mites / Fleas

Ferrets commonly get ear mites and can get a brownish discharge from their ears

Ear mites can cause middle ear infections & your ferret will become unbalanced.

Fleas are also common if your ferrets are around other animals.

Treatment of both is recommended using a dose of Revolution / Frontline.

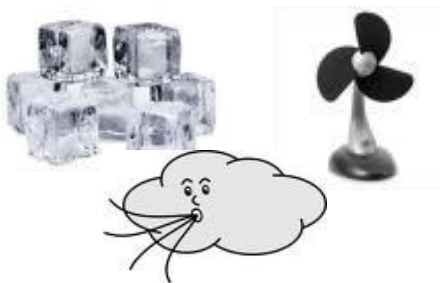
Please consult your vet for the recommended dosage as too much can cause problems.

Heat Stress

Ferrets do not cope with excessive temperature; they don't have sweat glands and can't rid themselves of excess heat. On very hot days 28 degrees & above caution is required. Your ferrets will need to be kept cool. Please consult your VFS committee member for advice on how to do this.

Some cooling methods for your ferrets are:

- * Keep in cool areas, laundry, breezeways, shade areas.
- * Ice bricks wrapped in towels.
- * Ice blocks in water bowl.
- * Air conditioning.



Please note if using Air-conditioning or fans.

Please ensure that they are not blowing directly onto the ferrets as this can cause a chill.

Foot Rot

Mange Mites can cause a disease called “Foot Rot”. If the ferret develops sore scabby feet, this is a sign that they have become infected. Dirty cages and warm damp conditions increase the chances of this becoming a problem. This is a very contagious condition. The ferret should be quarantined and see your ferret knowledgeable vet for treatment. It is wise to burn all old bedding and to sterilize the cages with disinfectant to prevent the infection spreading. It is believed that stress can also contribute to this debilitating problem, so it is common in strays.

Flu

Ferrets can be infected by the human Influenza Virus, so if you are ill it is advised to limit your contact with your ferrets. Be aware that ferrets can die from influenza.



Fur balls / Hair balls

Yes Ferrets do get fur balls; these balls of hair can cause a raspy and distinctive cough and have been known to lead to a gut obstruction needing surgical removal.

As with cats – ferrets groom themselves and each other, they swallow some of the hair / fur and it can build up over time.

As a safeguard against developing a bolus (ball) large enough to cause a bowel obstruction, it is sensible to give your ferret a lubricant (e.g. Cat lax) at regular intervals.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD)

Inflammation of the lining of the intestines may cause decreased absorption of food and water, resulting in diarrhea that may be soft and grainy in appearance or complete liquid. Inflammatory Bowel Disease can be the result of various maladies including: food allergies, viral infections and, immune disorders. One of the more common causes is the viral disease, Epizootic Catarrhal Enteritis (ECE) also known as "green slime disease" because of the green, mucoid appearance of the resulting diarrhea. In ECE, the infectious virus attacks the lining of the intestines and causes diarrhea. In some older ferrets the virus results in inflammatory bowel disease and chronic diarrhea that may have to be treated with anti-inflammatory medications.

Eosinophilic Gastro Enteritis (EGE)

Symptoms are similar to IBD. This condition mainly occurs in male ferrets Eosinophils (a type of white blood cell) accumulate, often in response to an allergic reaction; sometimes as a result of a parasite in the G.I. tract.

Treatment is usually long term, even life time; it consists of Steroids, Antibiotics and Ivermectin if parasites are confirmed.

Adrenal Disease

Adrenal Glands sit above and in front of the kidneys. This disease is fairly common in ferrets and occurs due to over production of hormones primarily an overgrowth of adrenal tissue forming a benign or cancerous tumour. The most common sign of this condition is loss of hair from the base of the tail moving upward towards the shoulders. This is accompanied by lethargy and weight loss.

The cause is thought to be due to inbreeding, early de-sexing and a high exposure to artificial light but this has yet to be proven.

Treatment - Drug therapy and surgery (either or both)

Ear Care

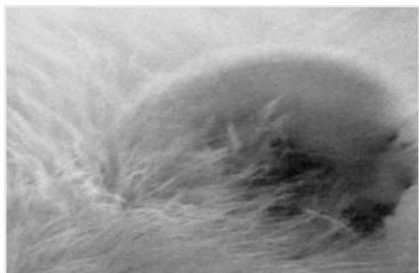
Your ferret's ears need to be checked regularly, it is a good idea to do a triple check each week – Ears, Teeth & Nails; by doing this you establish a routine which will benefit both you and your ferret.

The ear canal is a delicate structure so great care is needed during cleaning. Always work with caution.

Equipment: Gauze or lint squares, cotton buds, small bowl of cooled boiled water, commercial ear cleaner is available from pet stores & vets.

Method: Moisten the lint /gauze/swab tip, then gently wipe around the outside of the ear and down into the edge of the canal – repeat this until the ear is clean, then use a dry gauze/lint/swab to wipe out the moisture. If your ferret is agitated, the cleaning can be divided into two or more sessions.

Do Not - put swabs or implements down into the canal only work around the edge.



If ear drops are necessary put one –two drops into the canal then gently massage around the ear to help the medication move down the canal. Aim to keep the treated ear on the upper during the procedure.

Ferrets hate having their ears checked and treated so use treats – a small amount of Nutrigel on their tummy will distract them while you work.

Check for ear mites – often seen as a brownish patch – if found, they can be treated with a dose of Revolution or Frontline; your vet will advise you

(If unsure contact your Vet & they will show you how)

Dental

Ferrets need their teeth cleaned regularly - any problems can be detected and treated quickly; this way they will not deteriorate into severe dental problems. Neglected teeth can be the cause of Bacterial Infections, which in turn can lead to serious health issues involving all body organs. In ferrets, teeth cleaning can be assisted by giving chicken necks /wings and diced meat to chew on, also by using a finger brush and cat paste. Feline kibble with cleaning properties (e.g. Hills t/d) is available for those who wish to use it, check with your vet first.

Warning Do not use human toothpaste as this can be toxic to animals.



A Vet check and a professional clean may need to be done on a regular basis. With good dental hygiene, your ferret will have an overall healthier and happier life.

Nail Care

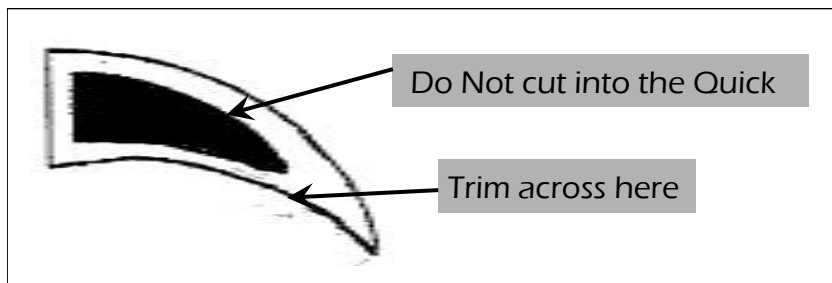
Long nails can be dangerous for ferrets, they break, split, get caught and pulled out, snagged on fabrics, toys, carpets and cage wire – the list is endless. It is a good practice to check your ferret's nails when you pick him/her up, and do any repairs immediately. A full manicure weekly or 2nd weekly is recommended.

Equipment: A sharp pair of nail clippers of an appropriate size and type, Styptic powder/ corn powder/soap block (to stop bleeding if it occurs).



Method: work in good light, Check each nail – examine the bed by gently holding back the cuticle area. The nail should be translucent with a blood vessel, (often called the ‘Quick’) running down the centre, from the base to near the top of each nail. Nerves lie alongside the blood vessel and will cause pain if touched.

Never cut into the quick, this will cause bleeding as well as pain. If this occurs use styptic powder (or other) to stop the bleeding. Cut above the visible blood vessel, if you are unable to see this – get help



Use a distraction in the form of a favourite treat to quieten your ferret while cutting, if you are unsure, get your vet or an experienced owner to assist you.

Please feel free to bring your ferrets to our meetings & we will assist you with nail trimming & ear cleaning.

Ferret Odour

Ferrets Smell Don't they ?

A ferret's natural odour comes from oils secreted from glands in the skin. The odour is said to be 'Musk like' since Musk is an ingredient in many perfumes, many people do not mind this smell, and many actually like it!

Some owners like to bath their ferrets to reduce the odour but bathing a ferret too often can in fact increase the odour.

Excessive bathing (more than once a month) will increase oil production the more oil produced the stronger the odour.

The natural Ferret odour can be substantially reduced by de-sexing the ferret this reduces the amount of oil produced.

All ferrets have a 'stink gland' near their anus; this is a part of their defence mechanism and should never be removed. When this anal gland has been removed the ferrets have suffered greatly, some with permanent diarrhoea and other health problems.

When the ferret lets off their stink gland a strong smell will loft through the air for about 10-15 minutes.



Other causes of ferret smell

Incorrect diet - this includes. Bread and Milk; carbohydrates; Fish products and fruit diets.

Environmental factors also play a part, clean cages, bedding and surroundings will have an effect on the overall odour.

Ferret Personality

Each ferret has its own distinct personality; they are wonderfully individual and no two are exactly the same - much like humans. The obvious difference is colour and size however the colour is merely a visual identity marker and has no reflection on its personality or behaviour.

The size of a ferret is usually related to the gender of the ferret- Jills are mainly smaller about $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ the size of the Hobs.

Ferret behaviour ranges from cheeky to bold to playful to shy. Even a mixture of all these at different times.

They may be timid and easily scared or adventurous and outgoing, some are all play, play and more play - others like to snuggle up for cuddles; some are rough some are gentle.

The variations are endless - each ferret is its own remarkable self.

Regardless of their personality your ferret will always love you and if it feels like it, will come when you call or use a squeaky toy.

When Ferrets play with each other it may look quite violent to an onlooker, who is inexperienced in ferret play.

However ferrets have very tough skin & seldom suffer serious injury during play.



Breeding

The breeding season for ferrets in Victoria is from approximately August to March. Both Jills and Hobs have a clearly defined breeding season, marked by the Jill's vulva swelling up to about 12mm in diameter (it is usually less than 2mm) and the hob's testicles descending into the scrotum.



Female in season

Mating takes several hours and appears quite violent. Gestation time is 42 days after which an average litter of 6-10 kits are born. They will be blind and deaf for between 3 & 5 weeks, weaning takes place between 6 and 8 weeks.

Please be aware that when in season, male ferrets may become aggressive to both other ferrets & their owners

Ferrets are sexually mature at about 4-8months old.

The VFS does not recommend breeding at this young age

If you are going to breed the VFS highly recommend you do your research before hand.

Please contact an experienced breeder, vet or contact the VFS direct.

Female ferrets who are not mated have about 90% chance in their first season of developing a “prolonged oestrus disease” which is a fatal form of Aplastic Anemia, it is also called “fading syndrome”, as she may take up to 6 weeks to gradually lose condition and die.

The statistics show that in subsequent seasons the mortality rate is closer to 100%.

Breeding

It can be avoided by having her spayed (i.e. de-sexed), by mating her with a vasectomised hob, or by giving her hormone injections which can be obtained from a Vet. The latter two only solve the problem for a short time, after which she will require mating if she comes into season again, or more injection.

Mating, pregnancy & delivery can be very stressful to the female ferret & complications quite often happen.

It may result in death to the mother, babies or both.

While baby ferrets are cute they do require constant attention & handling so they do not grow up to be large biting ferrets.



As there are too many ferrets in the population already,
The Victorian ferret society highly recommends de
-sexing of ferrets.

Litters of ferrets end up at animal shelters every year, as well as pregnant females. The VFS rescue between 100 to 200 ferrets a year & place them up for adoption after vet checks & handling.

Hunting

Ferrets are natural predators so they can be used for hunting rabbits. This involves placing nets over the rabbit holes & putting the ferrets into one of the holes then waiting for it to drive the rabbit out into the net. The idea is that the ferret will scare the rabbit which will then bolt from the burrow. On some occasions though the rabbit will bolt to a dead end tunnel, if this occurs the ferret will usually stay at the back end of the rabbit & not let the rabbit go. A rabbit will not usually bolt if there is a lot of noise above.

If the rabbits will not bolt you may have to dig your ferret out, as it will remain on guard and will stay down the burrows for an extended period of time, so patience is required.

Please note rabbits can kick your ferret so accidents may happen.

Ferrets should be trained and well handled

The use of a device called a “ferret finder” can assist the owner if the ferrets remain underground as a result of a rabbit not bolting.

The Ferret Finder is a battery operated tracking devise. A collar is put around the ferret’s neck & the devise sends out a signal. Once it is located your ferret can be dug out.



Hunting

Under no circumstances does the VFS condone leaving a ferret behind when it has remained underground in a burrow.

- * Rabbits which are caught must be killed humanely & quickly.
- * No live rabbits are to be transported from the area of hunting.
- * Hunting may require permits.
- * Permission must be given by the land owners.
- * Ferrets should **NEVER** be starved.
- * Ferrets are not to be over worked (extensive use of one ferret for long periods of time).
- * Ferrets must have water to drink available at all times.

In years past owners used to smoke their ferrets out of the burrow. This method is condemned by the VFS, smoke can cause eye, respiratory problems & allergies in ferrets and in other animals.

Equipment recommended required for rabbit Hunting:

- * Ferrets
- * Nets
- * Water
- * Locator collars & tracker
- * Ferret box
- * Shovel
- * 1st Aid Kit



VFS Members

Members of the Victorian Ferret Society have the opportunity to:

Attend monthly meetings

Meetings are held the second Friday of the month. The ferrets are able to interact with other ferrets & play games, they learn to socialize.

The owners will be able to discuss and receive ferret information from other members.

General public are welcome to attend our monthly meetings

Members are invited to Attend shows & displays throughout the year

The VFS attend a number of AGRICULTURAL SHOWS & PET EXPOS during the year at various places throughout Victoria. At the shows information & advice about ferrets is given out to the public.

Old & new Members are encouraged to attend these events.



At most shows ferret racing or ferret classes are held.

Lots of fun for the ferrets, and their handlers as well as the general public.

The VFS also runs social days for members to get together and exchange stories and ideas.



VFS Members

The Business of Ferrets

Members will receive a quarterly newsletter with updates about the societies activities plus stories & articles. We encourage members to contribute to the newsletter & send in stories about their ferrets & their adventures.

Members also Receive Discounts from the Fuzzy business shop

The Fuzzy business is a small shop run by the committee of the VFS which sells blankets, hammocks, ferret harnesses & other ferret goods.

All profits made from the Fuzzy Business goes to ferret welfare.



Goods are available to general public as well as Members.

MEMBERSHIP:

Membership to The VFS requires a small payment, which is due in April of each year.

Your membership fees go to the running of the Society & Ferret Welfare

NEW MEMBERS (ADULT/FAMILY) \$ 25.00

RENEWALS (ADULT/FAMILY) \$ 20.00

NEW MEMBERS (Junior under 16yrs) \$ 12.00

RENEWAL (Junior under 16yrs) \$ 10.00

CONTACT

www.vicferrets.org.au

**VICTORIAN FERRET SOCIETY INC. P.O. BOX 6764 St.Kilda
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Committee Member	Jodie Jewell	0437 092 003
Committee Member	Leah Eaton	0433 356 723
Committee Member	Daniel Breen	(03) 9793 3150
Committee Member	Raquel Tobar	0428 033 555
Show coordinator	James Pyers	(03) 5368 7073
Public Officer	Geoff Audsley	(03) 5232 2420

Welfare & Ferret rescue

The Victorian Ferret Society members, rescue between 100 & 200 ferrets each year. Our carers look after them until they are healthy again; they are then put up for adoption by ferret friendly people.

The ferrets picked up by the VFS are lost, neglected or unwanted. Animal Shelters / Hospitals, notably RSPCA, Lort Smith and The Lost Dogs Home, contact the society when they receive ferrets; our rescuers collect these ferrets and after care, re-home them. The rescued ferrets range in age from a few months to 5 – 6 years old.

Some have Health issues & others have bad attitude and behavioural problems. Some are suffering from sheer neglect, however many are fine and after 2 to 3 weeks are ready to go to their new homes.

All ferrets are Vet checked, de-sexed, tested for temperament, handled by carers and litter trained before being re-homed.

The carers of the VFS are very dedicated volunteers and will try to find a ferret that meets your needs - from the experienced ferret handler to the complete novice.

A ferret is not the pet for everyone – but if it is, you will have an experience like no other.

Please consider adopting one of our ferrets.



Welfare & Ferret rescue

For Rescue information Please contact the Welfare officer

Jaimey Unwin 0400 676 087 or

email ferretvic@hotmail.com

**If you have trouble contacting the Welfare office please contact
your local carer /rescuer**

Carers

Andrew & Mark	(North and East suburbs)	(03) 5944 3981
Haywood Family	(West)	(03) 53671509
Wayne	(Central and North suburbs)	0407 093 783
Monika	(Central and North suburbs)	(03) 9870 9682
Jodie	(South Western Suburbs)	0437 092 003



Rescuers

John Family	(South eastern)	(03) 9798 7672
Jan	(All areas)	(03) 9557 5499
Dee	(North East Suburbs)	(03) 9439 2252
Jaimey & Daniel	(All areas)	0400 676 087

Country areas Please ring Jan Smith

(03) 9557 5499



