

A PREDATOR IN THE FAMILY

Although actually a wild animal, the ferret has been tamed and bred by humans for thousands of years. The animal experts at the specialist retail chain Maxi Zoo know that for some years now this lively and inquisitive predator has also been very popular as a pet.

Strictly speaking, the ferret is the albino form of the European polecat with its white fur and red eyes. Its ancestral father is the European forest polecat. Through time, by crossing albino ferrets with the wild polecat, polecat ferrets developed with the most varied fur markings and colours. Back in antiquity, people made good use of the nimble little predators for finishing off rats and mice or hunting other rodents such as wild rabbits. In some countries, ferrets are popular hunting aides to this day: once satiated, the hunters send them into the rabbit warrens where they "ferret" out their quarry, shooping them into the open – so the humans can have an easy time of it bagging their game.

WHAT TO BEAR IN MIND WHEN KEEPING FERRETS.

Ferrets become very trusting and devoted which makes them both endearing and popular family members, like dogs or cats. They will accept a certain degree of upbringing and sometimes answer to their name and certain commands. Apart from that, they are clean and relatively house-trained if they have enough cat toilets as places of refuge. Their behaviour is especially characteristic: they are very animated, playful and get up to all sorts of things. When running free, they scramble and clamber everywhere and can also dig the



soil out of a flowerpot. Ferrets are no loners – they need at least one other ferret to feel comfortable. Then they will play, cuddle and pinch – and before you know it, even as a human playing with them, you'll feel the little predator's teeth. Ferrets can get used to dogs or cats in the household but rodents such as rats, hamsters or guinea pigs as well as birds are exactly their

kind of prey and could quickly fall victim.

These comical creatures reach an age of eight to ten years so anyone interested in keeping them should be aware of this. They need around one to two hours a day to run around freely – ideally even more and under supervision so that they can neither abscond nor get up to something unpleasant. With a little practice in a breast harness, ferrets will walk on the lead so you can also make trips into the countryside. Two ferrets need a cage or outdoor enclosure of at least two square metres. Several floors are ideal in the ferret house as this gives them ample opportunity for clambering around and other activities. The little meat-eaters get their food several times a day and it should consist of 80% flesh. Some owners reach for the cat food as cats have a similarly high protein and fat requirement. But in the long term just giving them cat food or food with too high a vegetable content damages the animals; it's better to resort to ferret food which can be obtained from pet shops. Pork, salty or sweet things are absolutely taboo. Because ferrets can spread a strong wild scent, it is advisable to have them neutered. With a pair that's not supposed to have young, it would be sensible in any case – even a must.

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