

# FERRET, BLACK-FOOTED

## RANGE:

Once ranging over 12 plains states and southern Canada, they are now being released into Arizona, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Utah/Colorado border and Mexico.

## HABITAT:

Prairie dog towns; occupy vacant burrows.

## SIZE:

Adults are 18 – 24 inches (including a 5 inch tail) and weigh 1.5 – 3 pounds.

## LIFE EXPECTANCY:

2 – 3 years in the wild; 6 or more years in captivity.

## REPRODUCTION:

Females breed their first spring when they are about 8 months old. Their breeding season peaks in February, but extends into March. Gestation period is about 42 – 45 days, so kits are born in May or June. 1 to 5 young are born in a litter, and the helpless newborns spend 4 – 6 weeks in the burrow with their mother, who raises them by herself. In September the juveniles will leave their natal areas to find and establish their own territories.

## DIET:

**Wild:** Food preference is prairie dogs; if scarce, they will also eat rabbits and mice in winter and ground squirrels in summer.

**Zoo:** Rabbits, hamsters, mink chow in pellet form, and protein/vitamin supplements.

## BEHAVIOR:

These nocturnal mammals spend days sleeping and nights marking, defending, and roaming their territories, where they search for food. Like other mustelids, such as skunks and weasels, they produce musk with an anal gland, used to mark their territories and for defense.

## POINTS OF INTEREST:

Probably spend 95% of their time underground. They survey their habitat by poking their heads out of the prairie dogs' burrows and looking in all directions. Behavior biologists call this periscoping. Active even on the coldest nights, they may travel a couple of miles and investigate between 50 and 400 burrows per night. These ferrets communicate by various types of vocalization. When frightened, they will chatter and hiss; they whimper when encouraging their young to follow.

## STATUS:

**Most highly endangered mammal in North America.** As of January 2006: 434 ferrets born and survived at the Louisville Zoo (some in breeding program, others released); 333 ferrets had been released into the wild from the Louisville Zoo; approximately 20 zoos now exhibit the Black-footed ferret.

As of November 2003, there were 330 surviving ferrets in the wild and 280 in captivity for breeding purposes.

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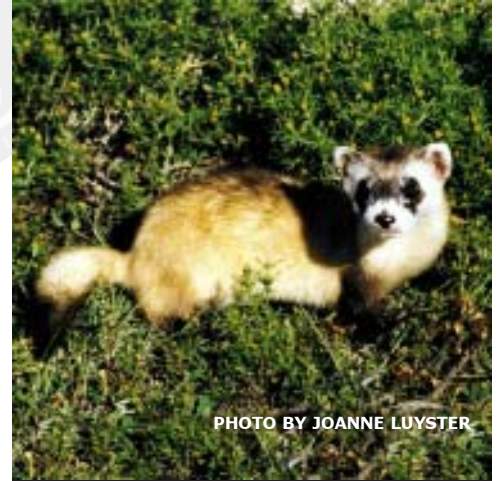


PHOTO BY JOANNE LUYSTER

Order:	<b>Carnivora</b>
Family:	<b>Mustelidae</b>
Genus:	<b>Mustela</b>
Species:	<b>nigripes</b>