Support for adopters

GUIDANCE FOR NEW FERRET OWNERS

Taking your new ferret home

You've chosen your new ferrets and are raring to take them home, but before you take one step through the front door there are a few things you need to sort out to make sure your home is ready for your new pets.

Moving on

Make sure that you have an appropriate carrier for when you pick up your new pets from the RSPCA. It should be secure and large enough for each of your ferrets to sit, turn around and lie down naturally in, or use a separate carrier for each pet. Familiar smelling items, such as a blanket from their bed at the animal centre or branch, may also help them feel at ease while travelling to their new home. Do not mix unfamiliar animals for the purpose of travelling.

Settling in

As your ferrets settle in, the best thing you can do to reassure your new pets is be calm and patient. Ferrets may be frightened of unfamiliar places and smells so make sure that they have access to safe hiding places that they can go to if feeling scared, and take things at their pace. Familiar smelling items from the centre/branch, such as bedding or toys, may also help your ferrets settle in more easily.

Remember your ferrets don't know you or your household, so introduce different activities and people over a period of time, particularly supervising any interactions with children.

Home comforts

Your home will probably be very different to the animal centre/ branch your pet was living in, including the accommodation itself. When your ferrets come home for the first time they will be faced with an unfamiliar environment. The animal centre/ branch will provide you with information about setting up their accommodation before you take them home. As well as somewhere to hide, your ferrets will need space to exercise and enough warm, dry and quiet places to sleep. They may also use litter trays and these will also need to be cleaned at least once a day. Safe toys and regular opportunities to play with people and by themselves will also help your ferrets settle in. Make sure that you have provided enough space/ toys/ litter trays, etc for each ferret too.

If your ferrets' behaviour changes or they show regular signs of stress or fear, talk to your vet.

Food and water

Changing your ferret's' diet suddenly can cause an upset tummy so feed your new ferrets with the diet they have been used to in order to reduce any risk of this. Information about your ferrets preferred food and advice on feeding will be provided in the adoption pack you will be given when you come to collect your pets. If you want to change your pets' diet to something else of your choice, do so gradually over about five days, mixing a little of the new food with the old to gradually wean your ferrets onto the new diet. Ferrets should ideally be fed their daily ration ad lib throughout the day (unless advised otherwise by a vet) as they prefer to eat little and often, and they must always have access to fresh water.

Good company

How well ferrets get along with each other in a group depends on factors such as genetics, housing and group composition as well as the ferrets' previous experiences. Carefully observe your ferrets each day to check for signs of stress, fear and/or aggression between them, so that you can review whether any changes need to be made to the housing or group. For example, it may be necessary to make changes such as adding hiding places. Each ferret should be alert, moving about, easy to handle, explorative and playful, without displaying any fearful behaviours. If you are having trouble with your pets' behaviour, speak to an expert, such as your vet.

Vet for your pet

Making sure you have someone professional to turn to if your ferrets are ill or involved in an accident is very important. Register your ferrets at a local veterinary practice before bringing them home from the centre/branch and research your choice thoroughly. You'll also need to give the vet your ferrets' medical record as soon as possible; this will be given to you in your adoption pack when you collect your pets.

Although there are very few pet insurance companies that offer insurance for pet ferrets, it is still worth thinking about taking out a policy. For just a few pounds a month, you'll be covered for unexpected vet bills in the future and safeguard your pets' health.

Health check

Make sure you treat your ferrets for fleas and worms as advised by your vet and continue their vaccinations– ask your vet how often and what products to use. If you have adopted a kit that has not been neutered, don't forget to get this done at the recommended age.

Regular grooming is also important to keep your ferrets' coats in tiptop condition. You may need to have patience as your ferret may not be used to being groomed. Reward your ferrets and don't shout at them if grooming is difficult at first- this will only make the experience more stressful for your pet. Check their nails regularly too.

Getting help

If things aren't going smoothly and you have concerns about your ferrets, talk to your vet or contact the RSPCA centre or branch from whom you adopted your ferrets.

There is lots of useful information and helpful tips on the RSPCA website: www.rspca.org.uk/ferrets and your local RSPCA centre/branch has leaflets and guides on a range of pet ownership topics.

It takes time, effort and understanding to help your pet get used to its new life, and to help it overcome problems, but all the time and effort will be worth it when the end result is a happy addition to your family!