

# Ferret Popularity: Pros & Cons

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Ferrets are rapidly becoming very popular pets in the United States. Some estimates put them as the third most popular mammal after cats and dogs. But what does this rising popularity mean for ferrets? As more and more households bring home ferrets, there are both good and bad consequences.

## Pros

There are many good things that have come out of the increasing popularity of ferrets as pets. One is that our beloved ferrets are slowly getting a much better reputation than they previously had. With every person that brings home a ferret and educates him or herself about them, there is another person out there to correct myths and misconceptions that exist about ferrets.

Other benefits include:

- More ferret specific [foods](#) have been developed to meet ferrets' nutritional needs.
- A huge selection of ferret specific products, including [cages](#), [treats](#), [toys](#), and more are now available.
- More veterinarians with significant experience treating ferrets are now available.
- There has been more research into ferret specific health problems and advances in treatments.
- More education is available for those who seek it.
- New laws and regulations have been created to protect ferrets.



## Cons

Despite all of the above benefits, there are some very serious downsides to the rising popularity of ferrets, and they all stem from the fact that ferrets are too available in pet stores as impulse purchases.

### Too many ferrets are abandoned and ferret shelters are full

This is how it happens: Someone walks into a pet store, sees the ferrets, and falls in love with one of them. All the impulse buyer considers is how cute the ferret is. He or she doesn't think about the long term ramifications and responsibilities of pet ownership. Though some of these owners will end up providing permanent, loving homes, many will surrender or abandon their ferrets when they decide that the responsibility of ferret ownership is too much for them.

Because of the increased number of surrenders, there is a growing need for ferret shelters, and existing shelters are filled beyond capacity. Some shelters have over a hundred ferrets waiting for someone to adopt them, and there are more ferrets coming in every day. The number of



people who are willing to adopt a slightly older ferret pales in comparison to the number of people who want a kit, so many shelter ferrets will live in shelters until they die.

### Too many ferrets are neglected or mistreated due to lack of education

In addition to the increased need for shelters, there are also more and more ferrets that are mistreated or neglected by their owners. In many cases, this has nothing to do with malicious intent. Rather, it is a direct consequence of people purchasing ferrets on a whim without educating themselves on ferret care, either before or after bringing home the ferret.

Many of these ferrets will eventually succumb to diseases that are not treated because their owners don't know what to look for and when to take their ferret to the veterinarian. Their owners don't understand how much interaction and attention ferrets need, they don't know about nutritional requirements, and they have very little knowledge of other facets of basic ferret care. Because of the owner's lack of ferret education, the ferret's quality of life suffers and his life span could be significantly shortened. The best intentions are useless without the proper knowledge behind them.



### High demand for kits plays a part in overbreeding of genetically deficient lines

Finally, the last major consequence of the rising popularity of ferrets is the increase in medical issues and genetic problems. Because there is such a high demand for baby ferrets, large scale breeders breed ferrets year round. They breed the ferrets that the public wants, many of which have fur colors and patterns that are the result of genetic mutations. In the past fifteen years or so, there has been an increase in both common and uncommon diseases. New diseases have emerged and spread. Can this be blamed on a failure to track bad bloodlines and stop breeding the ferrets within them? It's not the only reason, but it's very likely that genetics play a factor in the increase in health issues. Unfortunately, as long as there is such a high demand for cute kits, the large scale farms will continue to breed.

The key to countering all of these issues is education. If pet stores did a better job of educating potential ferret owners, people would be better prepared to take care of their ferrets. But the responsibility isn't only on them. You, as a knowledgeable ferret owner, can also help to educate the public about ferrets. There are many opportunities for education - in pet stores, on the street when your ferrets are out with you, in your home, and more.

