

## Colors & Patterns in Ferrets

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*



If your ferret is not one of the two natural colors of ferrets - sable or albino - it can be hard to distinguish what color she is. There are a wide range of colors and patterns of ferret coats, each with its own distinctive characteristics. What is the difference between color and pattern? What are the colors and patterns you may see?

### **COLORS vs. PATTERNS**

While some people will interchange these two terms, they actually refer to different things. "Color" is the color of the coat (guard hairs and undercoat), the eyes, and the nose. "Pattern" is how that color is distributed or concentrated on your ferret's body. The only true colors are sable and albino. All other colors and patterns are mutations brought about by selective breeding for desired colors by humans.

### **COLORS**

All ferrets have white hair at birth, but as they age, their guard hairs will start to darken (or will remain the same), and the result is one of a variety of different colors.



#### **Albino**

An albino ferret lacks pigmentation, which results in an all white coat and red or pink eyes. The actual white of the coat can range from a pure, snow-white to a yellowish white. They also have pink noses.

#### **Sable**

Sable is the most common ferret coat color, and it



is characterized by dark guard hairs that range from dark brown to black. The undercoat is cream, and it may show through the guard hairs a little or a lot. A true sable has brown or almost black eyes, and the nose can be pink, pink with brown patches, or black. Sables have a dark brown mask of fur around their eyes.

### **Black Sable**

A black sable has guard hairs so dark they appear black and a white or cream colored undercoat that barely shows through the guard hairs. Their eyes are dark brown or black, and the preferred nose color is an ash or blackish brown. Some black sables will have a speckled black or brown nose.



### **Chocolate**

A chocolate is a variation of a sable. Chocolates get their name from the unique milk chocolate brown shade of their guard hairs. Their undercoats are white or slightly golden. Their eyes are usually brown or dark burgundy, and the nose can be pink, brown, or a patchy combination of the two.

### **Champagne**

A champagne is a variation of a chocolate. The guard hairs are tan or diluted chocolate, and the undercoat is white or cream. The eyes are light to dark burgundy, and the preferred nose color is pink, beige, or a combination of the two.



### **Cinnamon**

Cinnamon ferrets are fairly rare, and they are characterized by light brown guard hairs with a strong reddish tone. The actual coat color can range from reddish brown to almost blonde. Their legs and tail are a slightly darker color than their body, and the mask is a shade or two lighter. The eyes are light or dark burgundy, and the nose can be brick colored, beige, light brown, or pink.



### **Dark-eyed White**

Dark-eyed whites (DEW's) are often mistaken for albinos, but DEW's do not lack pigmentation. Their fur (guard hairs and undercoat) is mainly

white to cream colored, though there may be some dark hairs sprinkled throughout on their back. Their eye color can range from burgundy to brown or black, and their noses are pink, black, or mottled. They are also known as Black-eyed whites or Dark-eyed White Patterns.

### Silver

This coat color has a number of variations ranging from light silver to almost gray. Many silvers will eventually lose all of their silver markings and end up as Dark-eyed Whites. The guard hairs can be silver, dark gray, and white. Some silvers have a definite pattern of silver hairs all over their body, while others will only have some silver rings around their tail. Silvers generally lack a full mask, instead having smudges of silver color around their eyes, which are dark brown or black. Their noses can be pink, black, or patchy. They are often referred to as black roans.

## PATTERNS

There are a variety of patterns and pattern combinations; below we will go over the basic patterns you may see in your ferret's coat. Color concentration patterns include roans, points/siamese, and solids. White marking patterns include mitts, blazes, and pandas.

### Roan

A roan ferret has 50% to 60% colored guard hairs and 40% to 50% white guard hairs. The type of mask and color of the nose will depend on what color they are. Variations of roans include Black Roan (Silver), Black Sable Roan, Champagne Roan, Chocolate Roan, Cinnamon Roan, and Sable Roan.

### Point or Siamese

Ferrets with a point or Siamese pattern have tails and legs (known as the "points") that are darker than their bodies. This is known as having a difference in "color concentration" between the body and the points. The mask is generally a thin "V," though Champagne Points may or may not have a mask. Variations of points include Black Point, Champagne Point, Chocolate Point, Cinnamon Point, and Sable Point.

## Solid

A ferret with a solid pattern appears to be one color concentration from her head to her tail. While she still has a lighter colored undercoat, it does not show through the colored guard hairs. Solids should have a full or T mask, and the nose color depends on what color the ferret is. Variations of solids include Black Solid, Black Sable Solid, Champagne Solid, Chocolate Solid, Cinnamon Solid, and Sable Solid.

## Mitts

A ferret that has "mitts" has four white feet. Any color ferrets can have mitts, and the mitts range from white tipped paws to completely white feet. Because mitts can be present on any color ferret, the masks and color concentrations vary greatly. Other white markings that can be present include a white bib, knee patches, and tail tip.

## Blaze

A ferret with a blaze pattern has distinctive white markings that include a long white blaze of fur down the middle of the head from the forehead to the shoulders. They may also have white mitts or tips on all four paws, white knee patches, and a white tipped tail. They do not generally have full masks. Instead, they have rings of color around their eyes or small masks. Their eyes vary in color from ruby red to brown, and the nose is usually pink or pink with a white outline. This pattern is prone to deafness. Blazes can be any color other than white.

## Panda

Panda can be any color and their distinctive marking is a white head that extends down to their shoulders and includes the neck and throat (a bib). They may have colored smudges of guard hairs around their eyes, and colored guard hairs form a saddle shape on their backs. Their eyes are generally a shade of burgundy, and their noses are pink or pink with a white outline. In addition to their heads, other white markings include mitts on all four feet, knee patches, and a white tail tip.

## CHOOSING A FERRET FOR COAT COLOR

Many potential ferret owners express interest in owning one of the colors that have been created through selective breeding. While silvers, chocolates, cinnamons, and other color variations of the standard Sable or Albino are very pretty, however there is no guarantee that they will stay that color. Most ferrets will change colors throughout their life, and the patterns will change. For example, just because you purchase a silver doesn't mean that you will end up with a silver. You may very well end up with a Dark-eyed White.

Normal coat changes occur as a ferret ages, during periods where they are in rut or estrus, and during the changing of the seasons. Some ferrets will be one color

during the summer and a completely different color during the winter. We strongly recommend that when choosing a ferret, you make your decision based on personality and compatibility rather than appearance.