

In recent years the advice regarding neutering of ferrets has evolved. It is now known that neutering can predispose to the onset of adrenal gland disease and therefore is no longer routinely recommended. However, when we keep ferrets in captivity we need to control their reproductive biology to avoid life threatening anaemia in females and to reduce body odour.

Females

Signs of Oestrus

Ferrets are seasonal breeders and start breeding as day-length increases in the Spring. The vulva of female ferrets will become markedly swollen when she comes into oestrus. If the jill is not mated, then she will stay in season until day-length shortens. However, if this happens there is an extremely high risk that the high levels of oestrogen associated with this continual oestrus will result in a life threatening anaemia. It is therefore very important that we control the length of oestrus in ferrets.

Ferret Oestrus Control

There are a number of choices available to control oestrus (season) in ferrets if you do not want to breed:

- ! Mating with a “teaser”
A “teaser” is a vasectomised male ferret that can mate with a female ferret and take them out of season without them becoming pregnant. Mating in ferrets can be quite violent, with the male inflicting damage to the skin at the back of the neck. Therefore this method of heat control tends to be used by working ferreters rather than to control heat in pet or show ferrets. It is not advisable to share “teaser” hobs between ferreters due to the risk of disease transmission.

- ! Surgery
Spaying will stop oestrus and reduce body odour, but it is now known to be associated with an increased risk of developing adrenal gland disease. The earlier a ferret is neutered, the sooner the likelihood of adrenal gland disease developing. If you plan to have your ferret surgically neutered then we would suggest your jill has her first season and then has a jill jab before her spay operation as this is thought to minimise the risk.
- ! Jill Jabs
A hormone injection (proligestone) is given under the skin at the start of breeding season in February/March. Most jill jabs will take the ferret out of oestrus for the full breeding season, but occasionally some individuals will need a second jab around September time. Ferrets don't like these jabs as they sting! There may also be a transient reaction at the site of the injection. Very occasionally they can result in skin complications or womb infections.
- ! Hormone Implant
A hormone implant (GnRH analogue) can be given to stop signs of oestrus. It is implanted under the skin at the back of the neck and usually lasts for eighteen to twenty-four months. Jills should be monitored closely from eighteen months after the implant is given and another implant given when any signs of oestrus show. Ferrets given implants in the Autumn are more likely to come back into season after eighteen months.

Males

During the breeding season male ferrets tend to become very smelly and have an unattractive “sticky” feel to their coats which does not make them welcome in the home! Therefore it is often necessary to consider sex hormone management in these entire males. We have the following options:

- ! Hormone Implant
The hormone implant used to control oestrus in females can also be used effectively in males. Again it is implanted every eighteen to twenty-four months.
- ! Castration
As long as we bear in mind the increased risk of adrenal gland disease in surgically neutered ferrets, then castration can be performed. However the surgery should not be performed until after puberty in order to delay the possible onset of adrenal disease.

Neutered Ferrets

If your ferret has already been neutered and is not showing any signs of adrenal disease then it is recommended to use a GnRH hormone implant every two years to reduce the risk of this developing. This applies to both male and female ferrets.

- NB: Please note that some of the above products are not licensed for use in the ferret and careful discussion with your veterinary surgeon should be undertaken before using them.

Please do not hesitate to contact us on 01722-333291 if you would like further information.



Quick Reference Guide

Ferret Neutering



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