

## **FERRETS How to handle**

It does require a level of confidence when handling ferrets. They are generally quick and evasive animals if they do not want to be caught but they are also inquisitive which does assist owners in picking them up either for playtime or when they need to be picked up or assessed. A toy that makes a noise or something that they see as a treat will attract the ferret meaning it can be retrieved easily.

In the majority of instances the ferret will approach the owner unless it is nervous or scared. Let the ferret approach you. If the ferret is at ground level then reduce your height so you are not standing over the ferret as this will make the animal more defensive and many animals see a cast shadow as a threatening scenario. Crouch down and extend your open hand (palm up) to the ferret. Their inquisitive nature will likely ensure that the ferret will either sniff or inspect the hand before continuing; this is key to gaining the ferrets trust. If the first inspection by the ferret is positive then the animal will either likely continue towards you if it is used to you or is confident or in some cases the ferret will actually place its paws on the hand if it recognises that this action is a precursor to the owner picking the ferret up and handling it.

By keeping the hand low and once the ferret accepts the hand as 'friendly' then the person can position the open palm of their hand between to support the main body of the ferret from the side, via the natural body gap between the front and back legs of the ferret.

It is important to support the ferrets main body at all times and allowing the weighty abdomen to swing can cause the ferret to become uncomfortable and add strain to the upper body area.

Once the ferret is supported in the palm of the hand then the ferret can be raised or carried using the second hand to cup / support the hind quarters of the ferret. Some owners will support the ferret using their forearm of the same arm and configuring their hand so the ferret's head is held between the thumb and index finger and the ferret's leg is between middle and ring finger.

Alternate methods of picking up a ferret is with the palm down and making an open 'U' shape between the thumb and index finger. This creates a natural support which can be placed under the front legs of the ferret allowing the animal to be lifted and then supported (the rear of the ferret) with the spare hand.

Scruffing is a method used for handling ferrets when the animal needs to be controlled or immobilised. It is advised that only those who have been shown how to scruff a ferret by an experienced handler should try this as it does create a situation where the ferret can be traumatised if done incorrectly. Under no instance should the ferret be lifted purely by the scruff of its neck which results in the ferret's legs leaving the floor.

The action of scruffing is intended to mimic or replicate the action of a dominant mother and intended to subdue the ferret. This action is normally seen in maternal females where the young are being carried either to or from a specific location. To ensure the movement of the animal the mother performs this action which normally results in the animal going limp and reducing the animal's movement. This is particularly helpful when done properly to inspect and examine a ferret; such as trimming claws, inspecting the general wellbeing of the animal or immobilising an animal which is especially active. It can also be used in behaviour training to subdue an aggressive ferret as described above, it mimics the hierarchy of a maternal female.