

Control of domestic ferrets on Kangaroo Island

FACT SHEET | JANUARY 2014



HISTORY

Ferrets were introduced into Australia in 1885 to control rabbits, and have established several small, feral populations on the mainland. There are two permanent populations in Tasmania. Ferrets are regarded as a major pest in New Zealand where they harm bird and small mammal populations. In Australia they have long been used for hunting animals and are becoming increasingly popular as household pets.

DESCRIPTION

The ferret has an elongated, narrow body and short legs. Its ears are rounded and flattened against the head, and it has numerous tactile facial whiskers. Ferrets have poor eyesight and are mainly nocturnal. They walk with their body low, sniffing for scent trails. Occasionally they stand on their hind legs to get a longer view and they run with arched back. They swim but are poor climbers.

Above: A ferret caught in the little penguin colony at Kingscote.

Colour:

The body varies from white through brown–black with a dense, woolly creamy-white to yellow undercoat. The tail is uniformly dark and bushy. The whitish face has a variable dark ‘mask’ across the eyes and nose. Domestic ferrets have been bred in a variety of colour patterns and albinos are not uncommon.

Weight and size:

vary seasonally and according to age and sex:

Female – head and body length 205–385 mm, tail length 70–140 mm, mass 600 g.

Male – head and body length 295–460 mm, tail length 105–190 mm, mass 1200 g.

Diet:

The ferret is carnivorous. It eats animals including: rabbits and hares, possums, rodents, birds, such as penguins, and their eggs, lizards, snakes, goanna eggs, frogs and toads, eels, various invertebrates and carrion.

Migration and movements:

Males have a range of 31 hectares and females 12.4 hectares. They hunt alone and are known to cache excess food.

Reproduction and lifespan:

Ferrets breed at the first spring after birth. They can give birth to up to two litters during the breeding season, each of 6–9 young, but juvenile mortality is high. The young are weaned at 6–8 weeks and become independent at three months. Wild ferrets can live for 4–5 years and in captivity 8–10 years with a maximum of 15 years.

FERRETS ON KANGAROO ISLAND

Ferrets exist on Kangaroo Island as domestic animals or for hunting rabbits on mainland Australia. Kangaroo Island is highly suited ecologically and climatically to supporting a feral ferret population. The pest potential for ferrets on Kangaroo Island is high. Escapes have occurred in Kingscote and Penneshaw.



Natural Resources
Kangaroo Island



Government
of South Australia

Impact on the environment:

The dietary and habitat preferences of ferrets would cause them to have a serious impact on: mammals (bandicoots, dunnarts, pigmy possums and possums), ground nesting birds and their eggs (bush stone-curlews, penguins, plovers and waders), echidnas, platypus, goannas and their eggs, lizards, snakes, frogs, and various invertebrates.

Impact on primary production and industry:

Ferrets have the potential to create a serious negative impact on poultry and egg producing operations on Kangaroo Island. The risk to Kangaroo Island's native animals and birdlife would have a detrimental effect on the Island's reputation as a premier wildlife and tourism destination. Ferrets are also known carriers of animal diseases such as rabies.

Impact on society:

Ferrets can be aggressive, particularly towards children and infants.

DOMESTIC FERRET PERMITS

A Domestic Ferret Permit must be obtained from the Kangaroo Island Natural Resource Management (KI NRM) Board under section 188 of the *Natural Resources Management Act* PRIOR to moving, possessing or selling a domestic ferret on Kangaroo Island. This includes non-resident visitors visiting Kangaroo Island with a ferret. All Permits expire on the 30 June each year, except Permits issued to non-resident visitors. To obtain a permit from the KI NRM Board, owners and ferrets must meet the following criteria as a minimum:

Microchip:

All domestic ferrets must be identified with a microchip, as used by Kangaroo Island Council for the identification of cats and dogs.

Desexed:

All domestic ferrets must be desexed.

Limit on Ferret Numbers:

Limit of two ferrets per premises and permit.

Effective Containment:

All ferrets kept on Kangaroo Island are to be contained in purpose-built enclosures matching the guidelines developed by the South Australian Ferret Association. An officer authorised under

the NRM Act will inspect ferret enclosures.

- » Ferrets are not allowed to roam freely over owners' property, gardens or backyards.
- » A ferret cage should have a minimal floor space of 300 mm x 600 mm per ferret, a hinged and latched lid and mesh floor. Cages need to be placed in the shade to avoid heat stress.
- » The risk of injury to an animal in the enclosure should be minimised having regard for general husbandry and welfare of the animals.

Record Keeping and Notification

The Domestic Ferret Permit holder must keep appropriate records, as outlined in the Permit Conditions, and make these available to an Authorised Officer if requested. The KI NRM Board must be notified:

- » PRIOR to taking possession, (and a Permit must be received), of a domestic ferret
- » if any animal should escape, be stolen or lost, the KI NRM Board must be notified as soon as practical but within 24hrs
- » of any change of address or ownership of a ferret within 5 days of a transfer occurring.

Ferrets Bought into Kangaroo Island:

Non resident visitors who bring a ferret to Kangaroo Island must comply with these Permit conditions and the Permit will only be issued for the period of time the ferret is on Kangaroo Island.

Movement:

Ferrets transported on Kangaroo Island must be done so in the following manner:

- » in secure carrying boxes
- » with adequate ventilation
- » in individual compartments for males in breeding season.

Offences:

The Offence for non compliance of this policy and permit conditions is in accordance with NRM (General) Regulations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Natural Resources Kangaroo Island:
www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/kangarooisland

South Australian Ferret Association:
<http://safoa.advancedscripting.com.au/public/>

REPORT ANY SIGHTINGS OF FERRETS ON KANGAROO ISLAND TO

Natural Resources Kangaroo Island
37 Dauncey Street Kingscote SA 5223
P 08 8553 4444
E kinrc@sa.gov.au
www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/kangarooisland

