Introduction

• Ferret is a small mustelid domesticated between 2000-3000 years ago
• Becoming very popular pets
• More evidence is required on how best to keep them, to promote play behaviours
• Aim of study: investigate housing and management factors of keeping ferrets which are associated with play and undesirable behaviours. Factors included:
  - Sex and de-sexing
  - Size of housing
  - Time spent confined
  - Amount of enrichment provided

Methods

A survey was designed to:

1) Describe housing and management practices used by ferret owners:
   - Sex and de-sexing
   - Size of housing
   - Time spent confined
   - Amount of enrichment provided

2) Describe ferret behaviour:
   - Play behaviour
   - Undesirable behaviour

Behaviours measured

• Play behaviours
  1. “Weasel war dance”
  2. “Dooking”

• Undesirable behaviours
  1. Bite-drag
  2. Bite-hurt
  3. Compulsive scratching
  4. Repetitive behaviour

Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rKBZSHubO8

Descriptive findings

• 466 respondents from Australia (47%) and overseas (53%)
• 1649 ferrets described
• 55% were male and 45% were female
• 80% of all ferrets were de-sexed
• Most common housing size was >6m²
• Most common to be confined for 19-21hrs a day
• Most ferrets had access to >6 enrichment items
• Most common behaviour was play and undesirable behaviours were uncommon

Behavioural differences between males and females

• Male ferrets showed more play behaviour (“weasel war dance”) than females ($P = 0.04$)
• No significant differences were observed between males and females for any other behaviour (all $P > 0.1$)
Effects of de-sexing

- Reduced the incidence of repetitive behaviour ($P = 0.01$)
- Had no significant effect on any other behaviour (all $P > 0.1$)
- No significant interactions were found between sex and de-sexed status (all $P > 0.10$)

Effect of enrichment on behaviour

- The number of enrichment items was shown to increase the incidence of weasel war dance ($P < 0.01$) and docking ($P = 0.01$)
- The number of enrichment items had no significant effect on:
  - Bite-drag ($P = 0.12$)
  - Compulsive scratching ($P = 0.27$)
  - Repetitive behaviour ($P = 0.30$)

Housing

- Size of enclosure had no significant effect on any behaviour (all $P > 0.1$)
- Number of hours spent confined had no significant effect on any behaviour (all $P > 0.1$)

Interaction between enrichment and housing

- There was a significant interaction between number of hours ferrets spent confined and number of enrichment items ($P = 0.03$) on the incidence of bite-hurt
- No significant interactions were found between the number of enrichment items, number of hours spent confined and size of enclosure (all $P > 0.1$)

Conclusions

- Ferrets seem to have adapted well to captivity and results indicate welfare is generally good
- Interactions between management and behaviour are complex
- Room for further research

Limitations

- Many participants were members of ferret clubs/societies
- Presumably, only dedicated ferret owners would completed survey
- Sample may not have been representative
THANK YOU
(The end)

Questions?