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Title: Husbandry Care for Ferrets

I. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to outline the minimum standards of care for ferrets.

II. Policy:

All units providing animal care for ferrets must meet or exceed these minimum requirements based on the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), the Public Health Service Policy, and the ILAR *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide)*, current edition.

Ferrets are not indigenous to California. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife requires a Restricted Species permit for obtaining and holding species that are deemed “detrimental” by the state. A copy of the permit must be posted on, or near, the vivarium room door where the restricted species is housed. The IACUC Office maintains this permit and will disseminate a current copy annually to all PIs with an approved ferret protocol.

III. Procedure:

Daily: (365 days a year without exception)

Observe each animal and check for health concerns.

Record sick or dead animals in accordance with the Campus Veterinary Services procedure for reporting sick or dead animals.

Feed each animal (feed must be appropriate for the individual’s age and condition (AWA 3.129).

Exemptions must be approved in animal care and use protocols. Expiration dates for food must be readily available. Food requiring refrigeration must be labeled with date opened and date of expiration.

Provide sufficient potable water (AWA 3.130).

Remove excreta and food waste to prevent soiling of ferrets (*AWA 3.131a*).

Spot clean cage or pen (include cage/ pen walls, resting boards, resting boxes, litter boxes and nesting boxes) as needed. If spot cleaning will require hosing, avoid animals becoming wet (*AWA 3.131a*).

Record Minimum and Maximum Temperatures.

Clean and Organize room.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife Restricted Species permit must be posted.

Record completion of room tasks, initial and date on room sheet.

Weekly (at least every 7 Days):

Provide clean litter box

Biweekly (at least every 14 days): Disinfect cages and gang pens. Ferrets must be removed from the cage/pen to prevent them coming in contact with the disinfectant. Disinfect feeders, water receptacles, resting boxes, nesting boxes, litter boxes and resting boards. Disinfect or change environmental enrichment. Disposable items should be discarded as soon as they are worn or soiled.

Monthly:

A monthly “acquisition/disposition” census for ferrets must be maintained and is the responsibility of the PI.

Quarterly (every 3 months):

Clean and disinfect the animal room/secondary enclosure

Identification:

Ferrets must be individually identified in addition to having an appropriately labeled cage card (See Standard of Care for Identification of Animals). Ferrets can be permanently identified with an ear tag, ear tattoo or micro-chip. If ferrets are micro-chipped, the reader must be readily available and functioning.

Environmental Enrichment:

Refer to the Environmental Enrichment policy. Ferrets should be provided with the ability to demonstrate species typical movements. Examples of enrichment for ferrets include: plastic toys, hammocks, cardboard boxes, resting boards, PVC pipes, social interaction (pair or gang housing of compatible animals), etc. Resting boards should not be higher than 24” from the cage/pen

floor to prevent injury to the animal. Devices used for environmental enrichment must be easily cleaned and disinfected or disposable. Devices must be checked regularly for wear and discarded when safety hazards are present.

Facilities Requirements:

Temperature alarms must be installed in all rooms housing ferrets. Room temperature range for ferrets is similar to rabbits: 61-72 °F (*Guide*, pg. 44). If the temperature falls outside specified range for longer than a brief period O&M must be contacted. Minimum of 10-15 fresh room air exchanges (*Guide*, pg. 46). “Floors should be moisture-resistant, nonabsorbent, impact-resistant, and relatively smooth...” (*Guide*, pg. 137). Refer to the Standard of Care on Facilities Maintenance.*

Caging:

Caging must be in good condition and free of any damage that may cause injury. Cat cages are commonly used for housing ferrets and provide adequate floor space for housing a compatible pair or a Jill and her kits. **Cages with grid floors must have bar spacing less than one inch apart.**

Space Requirements for ferrets in cat cages (*Guide*, pg. 59):

Weight of Animal	Floor Area/Animal (ft²)	Height (inches)
<4 kilograms	3.0	24
>4 kilograms	4.0	24