

Mink Facts & Care Sheet

Mink are members of the mustelidae family. This family, known to most as “weasels”, contains over 50 species, and are all true carnivores. The most familiar relatives of the mustelidae family include ferrets, mink, badgers, otters, and martens.

Mink vs. Ferret

What is the difference between a mink and a ferret?

Both mink and ferrets belong to the Mustelid family. They share similarities in the same way that dogs and wolves can be compared. All mustelids are carnivores; feeding them a diet other than strictly carnivorous will slowly kill a mustelid.

Perhaps the most notable difference between a mink and a ferret would be the animal's fur. Mink have very dense, smooth, soft fur - an attribute that leads to their being popularly farmed for their fur. Sadly, their beautiful fur is sought for luxuries ranging from mink coats, to false eyelashes made of mink hair. Conversely, a ferret's fur is coarse, not very dense, and lacks shine, so they are not farmed for their fur.

Temperament is another very distinguishable difference between mink and ferrets. While mink (and most other members of the mustelid family) are a very bite bunch and will likely lead to bloodied fingers if you attempt to handle them, ferrets are quite docile in comparison, making them the only truly domesticated animal in the family Mustelidae. So, while mink don't enjoy being handled, they do love to play in water! Mink spend more than half their life in the water, where they derive most of the protein in their diet from fish, crayfish, and amphibians. Ferrets, on the other hand, are able to swim, but prefer to stay on land, where they make a diet of small animals and rodents.

Mink as pets

Handling

As with other exotics, it is important to keep a mink's true nature in mind. Mink are hunters and will play rough. They typically do not like to be handled or petted, and their “personal” temperament is wholly unpredictable. In general, they are extremely high-energy creatures who will roughhouse when they play, which leads to being bitten! These bites are instinctual and therefore are very unlikely to learn not to bite. I like to say “Having a pet mink is like having a pet piranha: When you decide to play with your slinky piraña, you will get bit!” So, if having a cute, cuddly pet is important to you, a mink might not be the best choice.

Diet

Mink are strictly carnivorous, and will eat ONLY meat. Mink food is available in kibble form (here at SaveAFox we use X K Mink Foods brand) and is a high protein, low carbohydrate food that can be ordered online. We also supplement their diet with actual raw meats and bones from animals such as fish, chicken, and deer. Supplementing with these raw foods has many benefits for your mink such as stimulation, dental health, and nutrients; we highly recommend adding raw meats to your mink's kibble diet.

Housing

You will need a very strong enclosure for your mink, because even young mink can break through certain metals with their powerful jaws! I have seen them destroy the Ferret Nation brand cages that are commonly available, so those will not be suitable for a mink. We have an indoor enclosure as well as an outdoor enclosure. Our indoor enclosure is made of stainless steel with acrylic windows, and the dimensions are 60” x 48” x 24”. My pet mink stay in this enclosure during the winter because I prefer not to play with them outside during our Min-

nesota winters, although they could easily stay outdoors year round. Getting your mink a large outdoor cage is the best thing you could do for them! Here, our outdoor cage is a 10' by 5' walk-in cage with many levels, a pool and a waterslide. As cute as this sounds, the cage serves more of a purpose than that! Since mink have tremendous amounts of energy, this type of large, indestructible cage is essential to their wellbeing.

Training

While mink are not a cuddly pet, they are very trainable! Potty training them is possible, just like a ferret or a cat. They will do their business in a certain area such as on a paper or in designated litter, but just like potty training any other pet, you must have patience until they catch on! Here at SaveAFox, I "bucket" train the rescue mink for transport. They will walk into an empty bucket so that I can transport them, which is very useful when I need to clean their cage! After a bucket transfer, the mink are given a treat (raw chicken) which keeps their incentive to go in the bucket when needed. You might ask why I have the mink go in the bucket instead of a kennel carrier? They simply seem to prefer the bucket, probably because it seems more like a tunnel to them and they can slide into it on their bellies! In fact, once a mink is bucket trained well enough, I can allow them to run around the house for a couple hours (if you do this, please use caution and pay attention to them, mink can break a window, dig holes in the wall, rip vents out and get into air ducts, and even harm or kill other small pets). To gather them back, I just put the bucket down with the command "get in the bucket!" They comply by getting in the bucket so I can transport them back into their cage, and are rewarded with a delicious snack!

Vaccination

Our mink are vaccinated annually with two types of vaccines: the mink distemper vaccine, and the mink enteritis vaccine. Before deciding to adopt a mink, you will want to be sure that you have access to a veterinarian who works with exotics and will be able to provide these vaccinations.

Deciding to adopt a mink

Please, please don't adopt a mink just for the "cool" factor. With great coolness comes great responsibility! You must be prepared for the extra expenses of a raw diet, a really great enclosure, and exotic vet fees. You should also expect that your mink is simply not going to like to be held, at all. Know that your mink's dislike for being held does not mean that they dislike you! If you establish a great bond with your mink, they will follow you everywhere. Many even learn how to be free from their leash and can be clicker trained to come to you. I was able to bring my very first mink swimming with me and she would follow me around, but still, she never liked to be picked up or cuddled. If you give your mink all the recommended care, you can expect your mink to live up to ten years!