**Overview**

**Short description of Mustela furo, Feral Ferret**
The ferret is a descendant from the European polecat, with which it may be conspecific, although the steppe polecat may also be an ancestor. It is a large mustelid, larger than a stoat. Colour may range from dark brown to yellowish-white (albino). Some show the polecat’s masked face and distinctive pelage pattern.

**Description of Mustela furo, Feral Ferret status in GB**
Feral ferrets are established on Jersey, the Isle of Man and on many islands of the Hebrides. Apparently viable populations also occur in scattered locations in northern mainland GB. The GB population in 1995 was thought to number around 2,500 animals.

**Habitat summary: Mustela furo, Feral Ferret**
Feral populations occur in a range of lowland habitats in GB including moorland, heathland, and shores. In New Zealand, the species is abundant and widespread in a range of lowland habitats.

**Overview table**

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**Invasion history: Mustela furo, Feral Ferret**

**Origin**
The origin of the ferret is as a domestic animal, descended from wild polecats in southern Europe, used to help catch rabbits and farmed for fur.

**First Record**
Ferrets have been kept in GB since early Norman times. A mixed population of ferrets and introduced polecats became established on Mull (Scotland) in the 1930s.

**Pathway and Method**
Many occurrences of ferrets in the wild in GB probably result from escapes from captivity or are unwanted pets. In the 1950s, when the GB rabbit population fell
sharply and ferreting became less viable, large numbers of ferrets were abandoned in the wild. As recently as 1986 they have been released onto Scottish islands in attempts to control rabbits.

**Species Status**

The feral ferret is the most abundant introduced mustelid in New Zealand, where it was introduced for rabbit control. It now preys partly on rare native birds there and acts as a reservoir for bovine tuberculosis. In GB, escapes and releases on the mainland have apparently had low rates of survival and have not generally formed viable populations.

**Ecology & Habitat:** *Mustela furo*, Feral Ferret

**Dispersal Mechanisms**

There is little evidence of dispersal among feral ferrets in GB.

**Reproduction**

Feral ferrets are more social than polecats and often live in family groups.

**Known Predators/Herbivores**

None known.

**Resistant Stages**

None known.

**Habitat Occupied in GB**

Feral ferret populations occupy a range of lowland habitats including moorland, heathland and shores.

**Distribution:** *Mustela furo*, Feral Ferret

Viable populations existed in the 1990s on Shetland, the Outer Hebrides, Islay, Bute, Arran, the Isle of Man and Jersey.

**Impacts:** *Mustela furo*, Feral Ferret

**Environmental Impact**

Feral ferrets on the Isle of Harris are reported to have been responsible for the loss of ptarmigan from the Outer Hebrides. Predation occurs on rare ground-nesting birds on Shetland and other Scottish islands. Interbreeding with the native European polecat has apparently been widespread in GB, with potentially important consequences for polecat conservation.

**Health and Social Impact**

None known.

**Economic Impact**

Polecats and ferrets are reported to have taken a toll on domestic poultry.

**References & Links:** *Mustela furo*, Feral Ferret

**Identification**


**Biology, ecology, spread, vectors**


**Management and impact**


**General**
