

**BLACK FOOTED FERRET (*Mustela nigripes*)****Description**

This large, slim-bodied, weasel is a yellowish-brown or buff color with the top of the head and middle of the back is brown. The tip of the tail and the feet are dark or black. It has a dark or black mask around its eyes, with white areas above and below the mask. Males are larger than females. Black-footed ferrets are approximately 20 inches long with a 5-inch tail. They live in the burrows of prairie dog towns.

**Distribution**

Formerly, black-footed ferrets ranged from the Great Plains of Canada to the interior Rocky Mountains and Southwest. Black-tailed prairie dog distributions from north central Chihuahua suggest that black-footed ferrets may have occurred in Mexico within recent history even though none have been located there. In Nebraska the historic range of the black-footed ferret occurred in the western three-quarters of the state.

**Habitat**

The black-footed ferret is limited to open habitat, the same habitat used by prairie dogs: grasslands, steppe, and shrub steppe. Resting and birthing sites are in underground burrows, generally made by prairie dogs. They inhabit prairie dog burrows and utilize prairie dogs as their main prey item. Therefore, they are almost exclusively associated with prairie dog towns.

**Status**

Global: G1-Critically Imperiled. Federally Endangered. State Endangered. Nebraska: SH-Possibly Extirpated. Range-wide efforts to exterminate prairie dogs have critically reduced the size of prairie dog towns and their ability to support viable populations of black-footed ferrets. This combined with the contamination of their prey and effect of diseases, such as canine distemper and plague, led to the removal from the wild of the last known naturally occurring population in 1985. Captive raised animals have been reintroduced into the wild in Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, South Dakota, and Montana. Most reintroductions appear to be highly successful and promising. More reintroductions are scheduled at a number of sites in the future. The last confirmed wild ferret in Nebraska was in 1949. There have been a number of unconfirmed reports. However very few, if any, wild animals presently occur in Nebraska.

**Management**

The principle management of the black-footed ferret is through proper management and conservation of prairie dog towns. When possible, prairie dog towns should be left uncontrolled. If prairie dogs are controlled by the use of toxicants, the town should be first surveyed to insure that ferrets are not using it. It is critical to protect ferrets from human or other disturbances after reintroduction. Captive breeding and reintroductions in several areas have been successful at establishing reproducing populations.

**More Information**

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?sPCODE=A004>

<http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/ferret.asp>

<http://www.fws.gov/mountain%2Dprairie/species/mammals/blackfootedferret/>