

# Black-Footed Ferrets



Once thought to be globally extinct, black-footed ferrets are making a comeback. For the last thirty years, concerted efforts from many state and federal agencies, zoos, Native American tribes, conservation organizations and private landowners have given black-footed ferrets a second chance for survival. Today, recovery efforts have helped restore the black-footed ferret population to nearly 300 animals across North America. Although great strides have been made to recover the black-footed ferret, habitat loss and disease remain key threats to this highly endangered species.

## **Innovations (and peanut butter) give black-footed ferrets a boost**

An unlikely combination of peanut butter and drones has given biologists renewed hope for the future of North America's rarest mammal, the endangered black-footed ferret. Biologists are helping these fascinating animals and their main prey—prairie dogs—fight a deadly plague by dropping vaccine-laced bait into their habitat.



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Black-footed ferrets are one of the most endangered mammals in North America and are the only ferret species native to the continent. Their recovery in the wild signifies the health of the grassland ecosystem which they depend on to survive.



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**Black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*) family, mother with her young, Northern Great Plains, United States.**

Habitat loss and non-native disease threaten the recovery of the black-footed ferret. The ferret is entirely dependent on the presence of prairie dogs and their colonies for food, shelter and raising young. Without ample reintroduction sites and protection from plague, full black-footed ferret recovery remains difficult.



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WWF leads recovery efforts by working alongside tribal communities and their wildlife programs, public land and wildlife agencies, other conservation organizations, universities, zoos and private landowners to remove the black-footed ferret from the list of Threatened and Endangered Species. To achieve this, WWF and partners are: (1) maintaining and enhancing existing ferret populations, (2) identifying and establishing new ferret reintroduction sites, (3) supporting efforts to address sylvatic plague and (4) driving resources to achieving recovery.

## **PROTECTING BLACK-FOOTED FERRETS**

WWF leads recovery efforts by working alongside other conservation organizations, land management agencies, tribes and landowners to build the conditions necessary to see black-footed ferrets reach sustainable levels. WWF and partners maintain existing ferret sites, establish new reintroduction sites by relocating prairie dogs to increase ferret habitat, mitigate sylvatic plague on prairie dog colonies and participate in oral vaccine research to better protect prairie dogs from sylvatic plague.

## **RESTORING BLACK-FOOTED FERRET POPULATIONS**

Fifteen black-footed ferrets are being released into prairie dog colonies on the Fort Belknap Reservation in September 2015. Black-footed ferrets were first reintroduced on the Reservation in 1997, but an outbreak of sylvatic plague swept through the release sites in 1999 and decimated populations of ferrets and prairie dogs, the ferret's main food item. Since then, prairie dog populations have rebounded, new plague management tools are in place, and the Fort Belknap Fish and Wildlife Department, in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund, Defenders of Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are working together to return the masked bandit of the prairie to the Reservation. A total of 52 ferrets were released in 2013 and 2014.

