

Ferret Handling



Disclaimer

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- Each booklet illustrates one way to perform a skill and it is acknowledged that there are often other approaches. Before using the booklets students should check with their university or college whether the approach illustrated is acceptable in their context or whether an alternative method should be used.
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Equipment list: Ferret Handling

Equipment for this station:

- Model Ferret
- Pet carrier
- Towel

Considerations for this station:

- There is a useful supporting document found on blackboard; Animal Management 2 → Practicals → Exotics → Exotics Practical Handling Booklet
- Through practising on a model you can ensure your hand positioning and the sequence of steps is well rehearsed before approaching a live animal.

Please inform a member of staff if equipment is damaged or about to run out.



Clinical Skills: Ferret Handling



1.

Ferrets can vary greatly in temperament, from very friendly to quite aggressive. Therefore it is wise to treat every ferret you handle with care.

It is important to remember that well-handled ferrets don't usually bite unless they are stressed or in pain. However, ferrets that are not used to being handled will bite and hold on.



2.

Approach the cage calmly and quietly.

Ferrets are very inquisitive animals, so as you open the cage, allow/encourage the ferret to come to you.

Remember – ferrets have poor eyesight, so they may bite by mistake if you reach into a cage too suddenly.



3.

Lift the ferret from the cage by grasping around the shoulders and neck with one hand and supporting the hindquarters with the other. It is important to ensure the hindquarters are well supported as ferrets can be very wriggly and you want to avoid serious injury through their long bodies twisting.



4.

If the ferret is trying to bite then hold around its shoulders and neck and place your thumb (of the same hand) under its chin to prevent it dropping its head down to bite.



5.

The majority of your examination i.e. auscultating heart sounds, palpating lymph nodes and abdomen etc. can be conducted with the ferret sat in a natural position on the examination table. A second person may be needed to assist with the examination as ferrets can be quite difficult to hold still and examine at the same time!



6.

However, sexing tends to be easier in a vertical position as described in step 3.
REMEMBER – one hand should be kept on the ferret at all times (around the shoulder area) to prevent falls.



Clinical Skills: Sexing a ferret



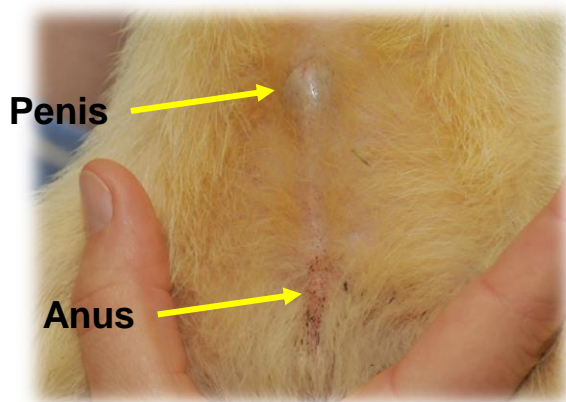
7.

Hold the ferret as described in step 3. You can use the hand that is supporting the hindquarters for positioning to enable you to examine the genitalia.



8.

Alternatively, it is also possible to rest the hindquarters on an examination table to have a closer look at the genitalia.



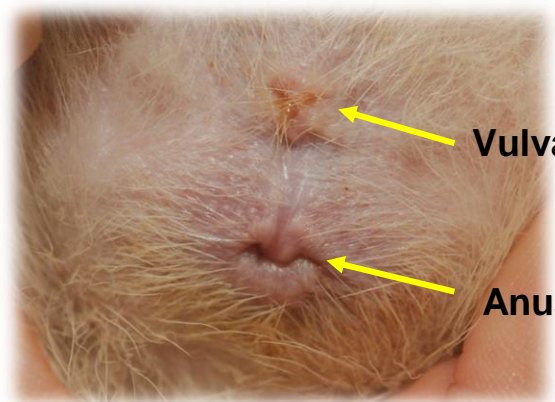
Penis

Anus

Male

The penis can be extruded; the testes may/may not be visible depending on season.

Adult males are usually larger than females and have a greater anogenital distance



Vulva

Anus

Female

Have a slit-like vulva which becomes very swollen in oestrus 'doughnut' and is positioned cranially to the anus.

No separate external urethral opening in female.



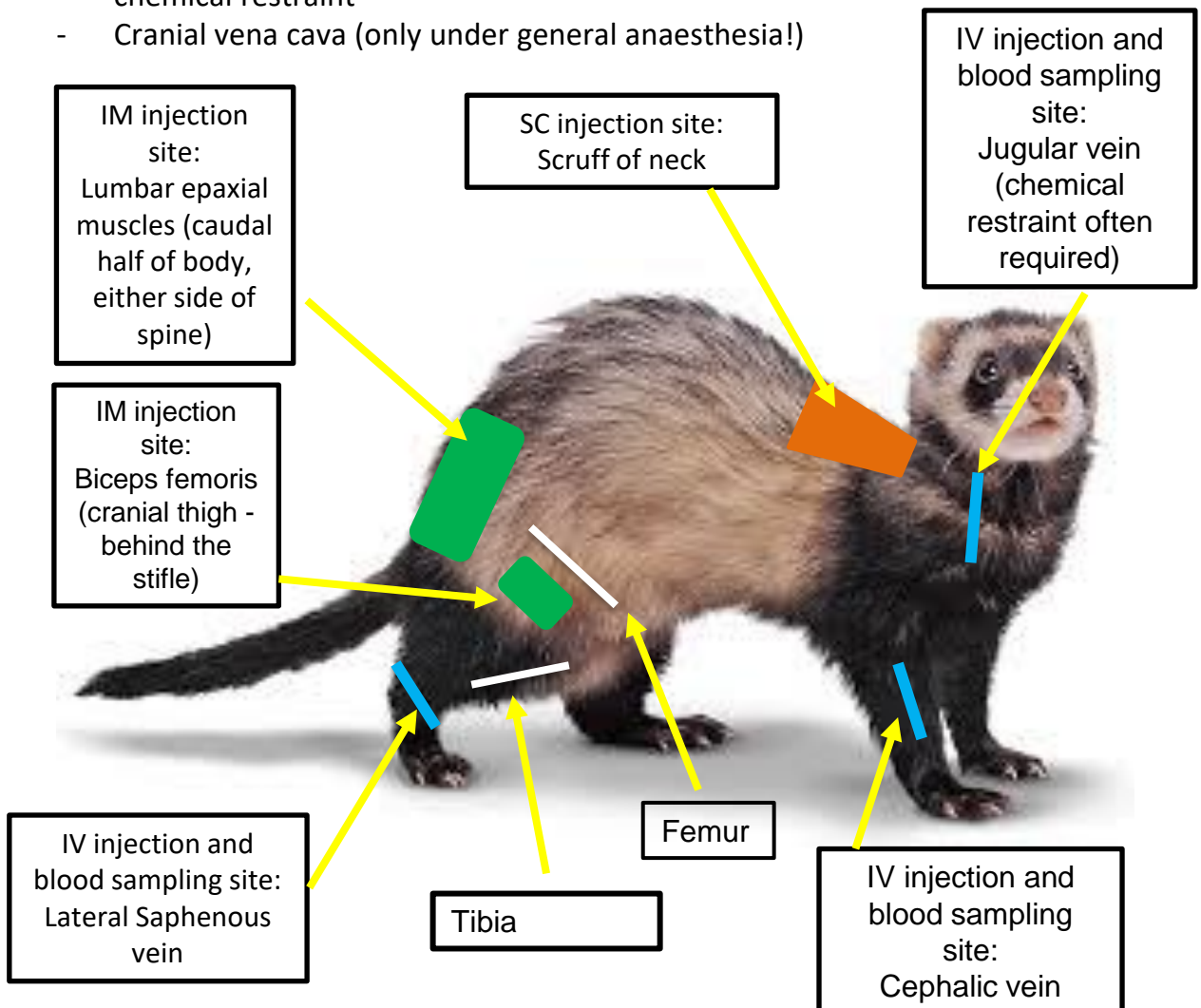
Clinical Skills: Injection Sites

Injection sites for ferrets include:

- Subcutaneous – scruff of neck
- Intramuscular – lumbar epaxial muscles or biceps femoris
- Intravenous – lateral saphenous vein (preferred site) or cephalic vein
The jugular vein can be used however, it is a little more challenging; ferrets are incredibly wriggly and restraint could increase the risk of spinal damage and therefore they may require chemical restraint.

Blood sampling sites include:

- Lateral saphenous vein (for obtaining small to medium volumes)
- Cephalic vein (for obtaining small volumes)
- Jugular vein (for obtaining small to medium volumes) again, may require chemical restraint
- Cranial vena cava (only under general anaesthesia!)





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Resetting the station: Ferret Handling

1. Please return the model ferret to the exotics handling box

Station ready for the next person:



Please inform a member of staff if equipment is damaged or about to run out.



Ferret Fact File

- Male : Hob
- Female : Jill
- Young : Kits
- Oestrus : Jills are 'seasonally monoestrous', females come into season as day length increases in spring and stay in oestrus until they are mated or until day length shortens again
- Gestation : 43 days
- Birth weight : 8 – 10 grams
- Size of litter : 1 – 15 (average 6)
- Stage of development at birth : Young are born blind, deaf and hairless
- Eyes open : 4 – 5 weeks
- Weaning age : 3 weeks onwards (usually completely weaned by 8 weeks)
- Breeding age : 4 – 9 months onwards (become sexually mature in their first spring, usually at around 9 months old, but some females show oestrus in their first autumn if they were born early in that season and weather conditions are suitable)
- Adult weight : 1-2kg for males / 0.5-0.9kg for females
- Life expectancy : 5-15 years (rarely >10)
- Rectal temperature: 37.8 – 40.0 °C
- Heart rate: 200 - 400 beats/min
- Respiratory rate: 33 - 36 breaths/min (potentially higher if stressed)



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I wish I'd known: Ferret Handling

- It is incredibly difficult to keep a ferret still on the examination table for a prolonged period, so it's a good idea to find an assistant to restrain during an examination.
- It is often a good idea to ask owners to bring ferret paste (a malt and multivitamin paste which ferrets seem to enjoy) with them to distract the ferret during an examination.