

Cookie Mascot 2026

Black Footed Ferret Friends

Patch Program



Celebrate the 2026 Cookie Mascot: The Black-Footed Ferret!

Get ready to have some fun learning about one of Colorado's most incredible critters—the Black-Footed Ferret! These playful, curious animals were once thought to be extinct, but thanks to conservation heroes, they're making a comeback.

Patches are available for purchase at the GSCO shop:

<https://shop.girlscoutsofcolorado.org/>

girl scouts 
of colorado

Cookie Mascot 2026

Black Footed Ferret Friends

Patch Program

Steps to earn the patch:

1. Discover ferret facts: Learn incredible facts about this rare Colorado native animal. Did you know they do a “ferret dance” when they’re excited?
2. Watch and wonder: Check out videos or live cams to see ferrets in action. (Choose Two) You’ll be amazed at their ninja-like moves!
3. Play and create: Dive into games and crafts that teach you about prairie life, complete a burrow maze, or a night sight activity! (Choose two or more)
4. Share the ferret love: Tell your cookie customers about our mascot’s story, plant native prairie grasses, or create a fun poster to spread the word. Every action helps protect their home!

Why It Matters:

Black-Footed Ferrets are super rare and super important for Colorado’s prairies. By learning and sharing, you’re helping keep these furry friends around for generations to come and protecting Colorado’s wildlife.



Black-Footed Ferret Facts

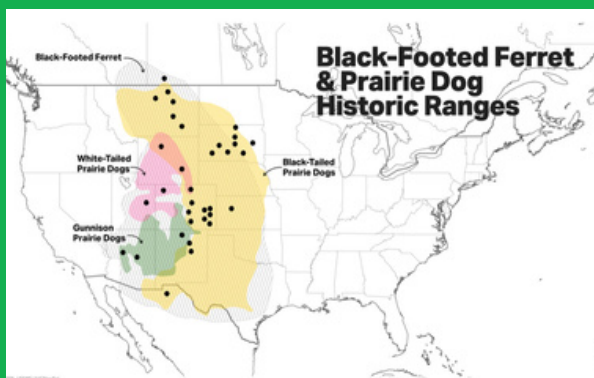
Endangered Friends: Black-footed ferrets are one of the most endangered animals in North America.

HABITAT:

These night ninjas love prairies—huge fields of grass. They stay near prairie dogs for meals and borrow their underground tunnels for homes. Protect prairie dog towns, and ferrets can grow, hunt, and stay safe.

RANGE:

These ferrets once spread across the Great Plains—from Canada to Mexico. Now they're rare, so helpers release them back into safe areas. Sites are in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, South Dakota, Utah, and Kansas, with more in nearby states and in Saskatchewan, Canada, and Chihuahua, Mexico.



LIFE CYCLE:

Think speed run! Black-footed ferrets are adults at about 1 year. They're mostly solo, teaming up in March–April to start families. A mom is pregnant for about 40 days and usually has 3–4 kits (zoos can see 7–8). Kits are tiny and helpless, eyes opening near day 37. Around day 60, they start exploring topside, by day 100, they move out, and by day 125, they're full-sized BFFs. Life Expectancy in the wild is 3 to 5 years.

DIET:

Wild: 90% Prairie dogs, but they will eat mice or other small mammals if they can't get a prairie dog.

Zoos: ground meat, rats

BEHAVIOR AND APPEARANCE:

Social Life: These ferrets are loners and come out mainly at night. They live in tunnels underground and usually take over prairie dog burrows rather than digging their own. That's why they live where prairie dogs are common.

Looks: Brown or tan fur with black feet, a black tail tip, and a black “mask.” Adults are short and light—roughly the length of a school ruler and the weight of a few apples.

Wild Ferrets in North America: Black-footed ferrets are the only ferrets that live in the wild in North America.

Not Your Household Pet: Pet ferrets are not black-footed ferrets. Pets came from Europe and have lived with people for a very long time.

Life Underground: Black-footed ferrets spend almost all their time underground—about 90% of their lives. Animals that live underground are called fossorial.

Training: Ferrets in breed-and-release programs attend specialized training areas, similar to a “boot camp,” to practice surviving outdoors before release.

Speedy Movers: They can run about 5 to 7 miles an hour. Most nights, they travel up to 6 miles to hunt and explore.

My, What Big Teeth You Have: Their teeth are huge for their size, which helps them grab and eat prey.

Predator Alert: Owls, Coyotes, foxes, badgers, bobcats, and even rattlesnakes may try to catch them.

Scientific Name: *Mustela nigripes* is the scientific name of the black-footed ferret. “Mustela” is a Latin word meaning weasel, while “nigripes” translates to black-footed.

A COMEBACK STORY: DECLARED EXTINCT TWICE!

The black-footed ferret nearly disappeared by the late 1950s due to habitat loss and a decline in prairie dog populations. Though rediscovered in 1964 in South Dakota, their numbers dwindled again, and by 1979, they were thought to be extinct once more. On September 26, 1981, a dog named Shep found a black-footed ferret, leading to discoveries in Wyoming. Annual celebrations honor Shep's role in bringing attention to the species. By 1985, the disease further threatened the ferrets, prompting scientists to take the remaining few into captivity for breeding. Since 1991, various organizations have been working to restore their population, aiming for at least 3,000 ferrets in the wild.

As of 2025, there are six breeding sites and 33 release locations, with an estimated 300 ferrets living in the wild today, supported by over 40 collaborative groups.



Watch and Wonder:

Watch videos or live cams to see ferrets in action. You'll be amazed at their ninja-like moves!

Watch and Wonder Options (Choose two):

US Fish and Wildlife Conservation Connect: Black Footed Ferrets (8 minutes)

Colorado Parks and Wildlife 'Saving the Black-Footed Ferret in Colorado' (10 minutes)

PBS News Hour – 'How the BFF is making a comeback from the brink of extinction' (10 minutes)

Nature on PBS 'Saving America's Wild Ferrets from the Plague' (18 minutes)

Watch a Black footed ferret live-cam and complete the FBB citizen scientist journal (on the next five pages)



Watch & Wonder: Citizen Science Journal

Below is a ready-to-use Citizen Science Journal designed for Girl Scout Juniors and up observing the black-footed ferret live-cam. It includes age-flexible prompts, guiding questions about habitat, diet, society, and daily life, and space for reflective science thinking. Feel free to use this journal in whatever way works best for your Girl Scout!

Observation Session Info

Date:

Time:

Length of observation:

Live cam location:

What Do You Notice First?

What is the ferret doing as you begin watching?

What objects or features do you see in its environment?

What colors, shapes, or textures stand out?



Watch and Wonder: Citizen Science Journal

Habitat Questions

What does the habitat look like (burrows, tunnels, grasses, rocks, etc.)?

Can you spot anything the ferret uses for shelter?

Does the habitat look natural, artificial, or a mix?

What materials does the ferret interact with most?

How does the environment help the ferret hide, hunt, or stay safe?

Do you notice changes in lighting or temperature cues (sun/shade, heat lamps)?

Does the ferret spend more time above ground or in tunnels?

Optional Challenge Questions (Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors)

How might this habitat compare to wild prairie dog colonies where black-footed ferrets naturally live?

What environmental problems could threaten this habitat?

Watch and Wonder: Citizen Science Journal

Diet and Eating Behavior Questions

Do you see any food? What kind?

Does the ferret store food or eat it immediately?

How does the ferret move while eating (nibbling, tearing, holding with paws)?

Does the ferret sniff or investigate food first?

How long does it spend eating?

Does the ferret drink water during your observation?

Optional Challenge Questions (Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors)

In the wild, black-footed ferrets eat mostly prairie dogs. What behaviors do you see that might help them hunt?

Can you infer anything about their metabolism or energy needs?

Watch and Wonder: Citizen Science Journal

Society, Behavior, and Communication Questions

Is the ferret alone or with others?

If there are multiple ferrets, how do they interact?

Do you notice playful behavior (pouncing, rolling, chasing)?

Does the ferret make any sounds (chattering, squeaking)?

How does the ferret use its body to communicate (tail position, posture, pawing)?

Does the ferret seem curious, cautious, sleepy, or energetic?

Optional Challenge Questions (Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors)

What behaviors might be important for mothers raising kits?

Are there clues that show how ferrets protect or claim territory?

Watch and Wonder: Citizen Science Journal

Scientific Sketch or Diagram

Drawing increases observation skills.

Sketch the ferret. Label key features: mask, black feet, tail, ears. Sketch part of the habitat and label any structures.

Reflection Questions

What surprised you today?

What new questions do you have after watching?

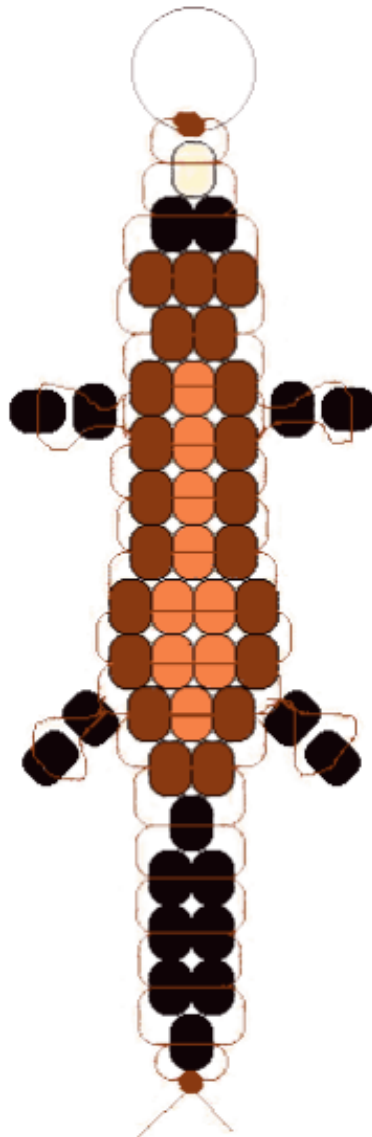
What would you study if you were a real black-footed ferret scientist?

Play and Create

Ferret Pony Bead Charm

Materials:

- 2 yards of cord or plastic lacing
- Scissors
- 1 lanyard hook
- Keychain or charm ring
- 1 tan pony bead
- 18 black pony beads
- 21 dark brown pony beads
- 9 light brown pony beads



Play and Create

7 Easy Steps to Draw a Ferret

PRACTICE HERE:



Step 1: First, draw the head



Step 2: Draw the face of Black-footed ferret



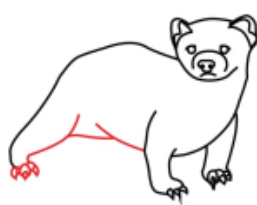
Step 3: Draw the body.



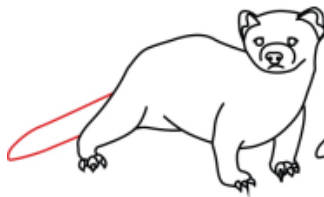
Step 4: Draw the front leg.



Step 5: Draw the other front leg.



Step 6: Then, draw the hind leg.



Step 7: Draw the tail.



Your Black-footed ferret is now done!

Play and Create

Night Sight Activity

A twist on a traditional tag game, players are challenged to use their other senses rather than sight. The player acting as the predator takes on the role of a nocturnal animal, which makes the game a bit more challenging and fun.

Materials:

- Blindfold
- Noisemaker (like a box of cereal or a maraca)
- Large, flat, open space

How to play:

Players take turns blindfolded as the predator, using other senses to catch and tag the prey.

The predator is blindfolded and then spun in circles three times to disorient them.

Prey players each have a noisemaker that they must shake as they move, helping the predator locate them by sound.

To count as caught, the predator must hold onto the prey for a count of three.

The game ends when all prey players are caught or after three minutes.

Extra Challenge:

No noisemakers! Remove them and see how this changes the hunt.



Play and Create: Word Find

FERRET IT OUT!

See if you can find these words associated with the Black-footed Ferret!

Words can go across, up, down, diagonal, forward, or backward.

Y B S N A M M A L Q U I S T R E P I S
E A U O N X W E N I H S E Y E S L P O
G L P R E Y I Y X T C F O O I M A S K
H M R L R O L Z O I R B U C N R N H T
E T A M A O D E R M C O N A T A C O A
L Z I M J G W M V A I O O N R C A R T
P N R A M N U A X I T N W A O T A T I
G K I T S A V E C G V K G D D R T G B
J Y E I X T L A V K W R N A U Q P R A
Z R D M E I W E A S E L U I C L U A H
O S O E Q V I L E C O S Y S T E M S O
O N G P R E D A T O R C U W I X Z S F
S K S E N D A N G E R E D P O D E N C
B F F S H K L A N R U T C O N A L G C

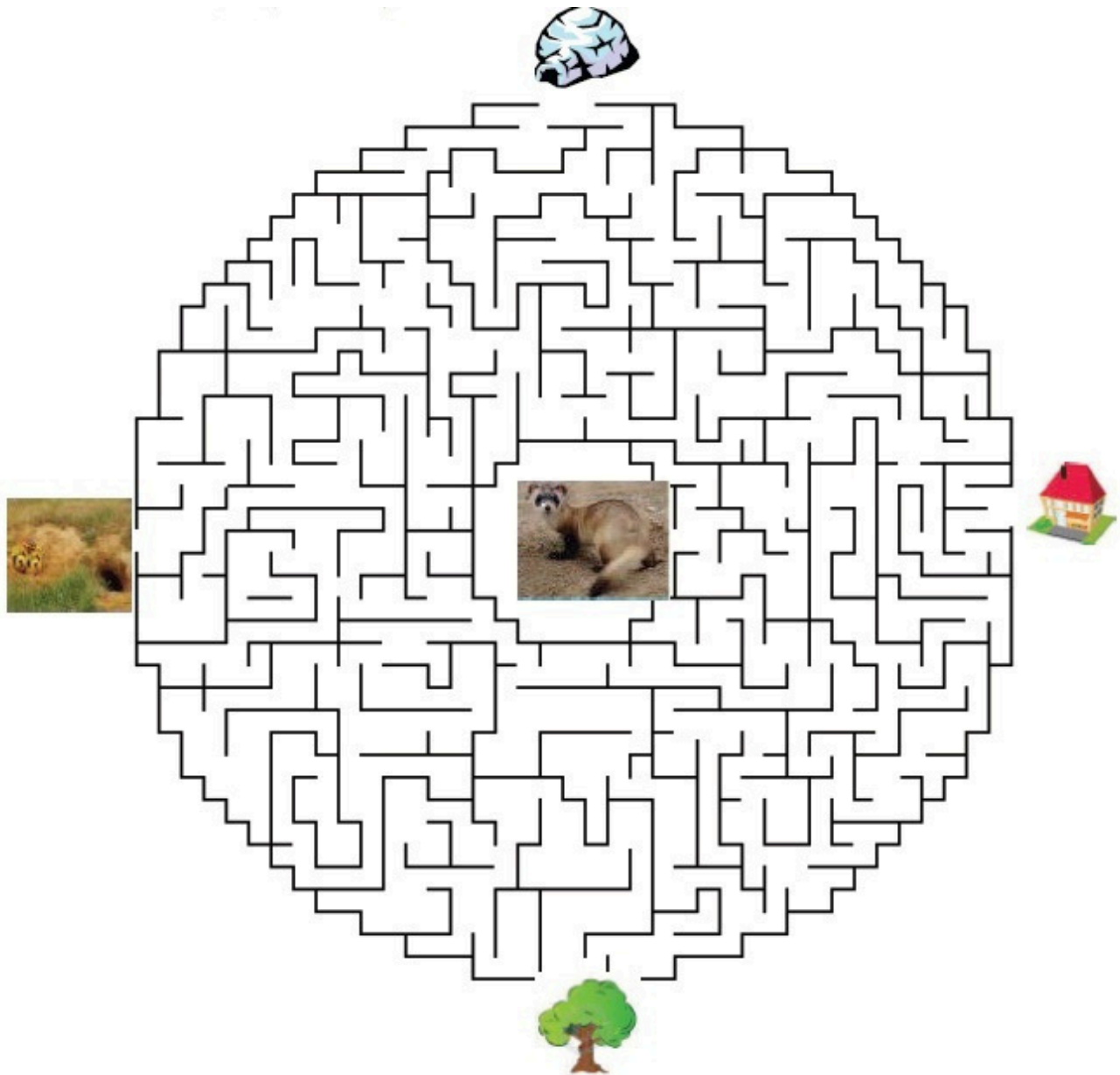
BURROW
ECOSYSTEM
ENDANGERED
EYESHINE
HABITAT
KITS
MAMMAL

NATIVE
NOCTURNAL
PLAGUE
PRAIRIE DOGS
PREDATOR
PREY
REINTRODUCTION

SHORT GRASS
SURVIVE
TRAPS
WEASEL
WILD
WYOMING
ZOO

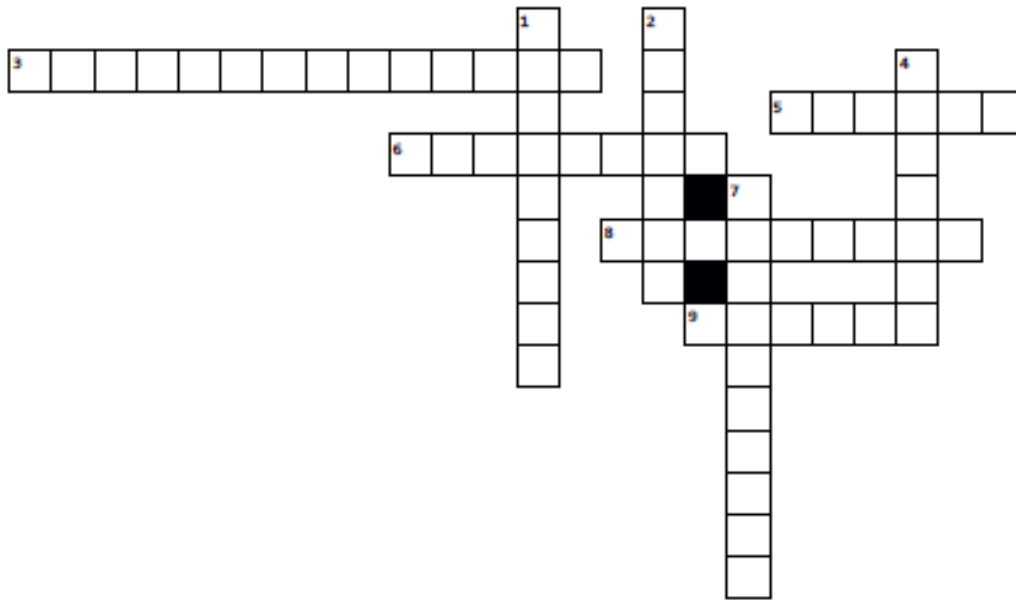
Play and Create: Black-footed Ferret Maze

Can your Black-footed Ferret find it's way home?



Play and Create:

Crossword puzzle



Across

3. The conservation practice of releasing animals back into their native habitat. Black-footed ferrets have made a comeback thanks to dedicated rewilding efforts.

5. The network of underground tunnels. Ferrets treat these like subterranean mansions with built-in food storage.

6. A member of the weasel family, including ferrets, otters, and badgers. The black-footed ferret fits right in with its sneaky, noodle-shaped relatives.

8. A meat-eater through and through. Salad is not on the menu.

9. A dangerous viral disease that can wipe out ferret populations. Think of it as a villain in their survival story.

Down

1. Active at night. While you sleep, black-footed ferrets are out prowling like masked bandits.

2. This occurs when roads, farms, and development chop up natural environments. The ferret's prairie home has suffered a bad case of patchwork.

4. The type of dog is the ferret's primary prey and also its landlord.

7. When a species is at serious risk of extinction. Black-footed ferrets have been clinging to existence like tiny, whiskered superheroes.

Play and Create:

Crossword puzzle ANSWERS

Across

3. The conservation practice of releasing animals back into their native habitat. Black-footed ferrets have made a comeback thanks to dedicated rewilding efforts.

REINTRODUCTION

5. A network of underground tunnels. Ferrets treat these like subterranean mansions with built-in food storage.

BURROW

6. A member of the weasel family, including ferrets, otters, and badgers. The black-footed ferret fits right in with its sneaky, noodle-shaped relatives.

MUSTELID

8. A meat-eater through and through. Salad is not on the menu.

CARNIVORE

9. A dangerous viral disease that can wipe out ferret populations. Think of it as a villain in their survival story.

CANINE DISTEMPER

Down

1. Active at night. While you sleep, black-footed ferrets are out prowling like masked bandits.

NOCTURNAL

2. This occurs when roads, farms, and development chop up natural environments. The ferret's prairie home has suffered a bad case of patchwork.

HABITAT FRAGMENTATION

4. The type of dog is the ferret's primary prey and also its landlord.

PRARIE

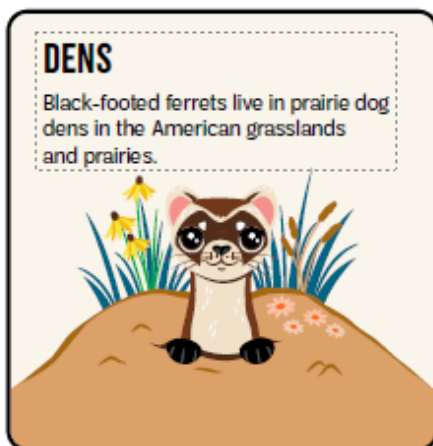
7. When a species is at serious risk of extinction. Black-footed ferrets have been clinging to existence like tiny, whiskered superheroes.

ENDANGERED



Play and Create: Concentration Game

Take care of business. Print two sets and play a concentration matching game and learn all about the Black-footed Ferret mascot.



Play and Create:

Where do Black-footed Ferrets Live?

Where Do Black-footed Ferrets Live?

Black-footed ferrets live on wide grasslands where prairie dogs are common. They hunt prairie dogs and take over their burrows to sleep, hide, and raise their young. Grasslands are big, mostly flat places with few trees and lots of grasses. Ferrets are small weasels with yellow-brown fur, black feet, a black tail tip, and a dark mask like a raccoon. In spring, a mother has one to seven babies called kits in a prairie dog burrow. Because they are mammals, the kits drink their mother's milk at first. After a few weeks, the kits peek outside and start exploring. Through summer, they learn to hunt and stay safe by following their mom. By October, most are full grown and ready to live on their own.

Discuss the stages of growth for the kit and ask information from Girl Scouts about how kits live at each stage of life; for each stage, ask Girl Scouts questions such as where they live and what they eat.

Newborn kits - stay in the burrow close to the mother and are fed on the mother's milk.

Young kits - begin to leave the burrow and explore the area around it. They are also fed mother's milk and begin to eat meat.

Older kits - begin to move farther from the burrow and to follow the mother when hunting. Older kits eat animals their mother has caught.

Young adults - move to new areas, find empty burrows for themselves, and begin to hunt on their own

Play and Create: Black Footed Ferret Repopulation

Purpose of the Activity:

Girl Scouts explore how genetic diversity influences the survival of a black-footed ferret population when confronted with actual environmental challenges.

Materials Needed:

- 1 large plastic bottle with a narrow neck
- 270 pony beads (30 of each):
 - Yellow – Camouflage
 - Black – Precise Vision
 - Orange – Accurate Sense of Smell
 - Pink – Strong Claws & Forearms
 - Blue – Healthy Jaw Formation
 - Green – Speed & Agility
 - Purple – Acute Hearing
 - Red – Healthy Rate of Reproduction
 - White – Immunity to Canine Distemper
- Situation Cards
- Black-Footed Ferret Population Predictor Sheets
- Pencils

Preparation:

- Pour all pony beads into the bottle.
- Shake well so the colors are fully mixed.
- Lay out the cut Situation Cards and Population Indicator Sheets.

Play and Create: Black Footed Ferret Repopulation

Activity Instructions

Form Groups

- Divide Girl Scouts into groups of 2–4 players.
- Give each group 1–2 Situation Cards and one Population Predictor Sheet.

Draw Your Ferret Genes

- Each group draws 14 beads from the bottle.
- These represent the genes in a breeding population:
 - 7 “female” genes
 - 7 “partner” genes
- Explain that every ferret population is unique—not all colors need to appear.

Interpret the Genes

- Ensure all players understand what each bead color represents and how each trait helps ferrets survive in the wild.

Complete the Population Indicator Sheet

- Record each gene (bead color) the group drew.

Determine the population’s overall genetic diversity using:

"Number of different gene types your population has" / 9 possible gene types = decimal × 100 = Genetic Diversity %

Apply the Environmental Situations

- For each Situation Card a group has:
 - a. Read the scenario.
 - b. Identify which traits (bead colors) your ferrets have that help—or fail to help—in the situation.

Play and Create: Black Footed Ferret Repopulation

Population Indicators

Complete the chart after you've received your beads. (print one for each group)

Gene (Bead Color)	Trait	Present?
Yellow	Camouflage	
Black	Precise Vision	
Orange	Accute Sense of Smell	
Pink	Strong Claws and Forearms	
Blue	Healthy Jaw Formation	
Green	Speed and Agility	
Purple	Acute Hearing	
Red	Healthy Rate of Reproduction	
White	Immunity to Canine Distemper	

Play and Create: Black Footed Ferret Repopulation

Environmental Situations

Please cut out each Scenario with it's Challenge and Hint.

<p>Scenario: Sylvatic Plagues Plague strikes the prairie dog colony: 80% die.</p>	<p>Challenge: Can your population find a new source of food?</p>	<p>Hint: Prairie dogs are essential for ferret survival.</p>
<p>Scenario: Night Predator A coyote prowls at night.</p>	<p>Challenge: Can your population avoid this predator?</p>	<p>Hint: A good sense of smell helps detect danger.</p>
<p>Scenario: Burrow Battle An aggressive prairie dog fights back in its burrow.</p>	<p>Challenge: Does your population have strong jaws to win?</p>	<p>Hint: Physical traits matter in survival.</p>
<p>Scenario: Owl Attack A great horned owl hunts at night.</p>	<p>Challenge: Can your ferrets remain unseen?</p>	<p>Hint: Stealth and timing are key.</p>
<p>Scenario: Expansion Opportunity A prairie dog colony forms on nearby protected land.</p>	<p>Challenge: Can your ferrets expand into the new colong?</p>	<p>Hint: Migration can boost survival chances.</p>
<p>Scenario: Soil Hardening Drought compacts prairie soil.</p>	<p>Challenge: Can your population dig?</p>	<p>Hint: Adaptation is key to survival.</p>

Play and Create:

Black Footed Ferret Repopulation

<p>Scenario: Prairie Dog Decline A farmer eliminates prairie dogs near your habitat to protect crops.</p>	<p>Challenge: Can your population find a new source of food?</p>	<p>Hint: Ferrets depend on prairie dogs for both food and shelter.</p>
<p>Scenario: Kit Boom More kits survive than usual from this year's litters.</p>	<p>Challenge: Can they find their own territory in nearby prairie dog towns?</p>	<p>Hint: Overcrowding can lead to competition for resources.</p>
<p>Scenario: Habitat Loss Humans building homes 10 miles away wiped out a prairie dog colony.</p>	<p>Challenge: Can your population survive being invaded by another group of ferrets looking for food?</p>	<p>Hint: Territorial disputes can reduce survival rates.</p>
<p>Scenario: Low Reproduction Females can only produce 1 kit per year unless they have a healthy reproduction gene.</p>	<p>Challenge: What happens if your population can't produce enough kits?</p>	<p>Hint: Genetic diversity matters for long-term survival.</p>
<p>Scenario: Disease Threat Females can only produce 1 kit per year unless they have a healthy reproduction gene.</p>	<p>Challenge: Will your population die of disease?</p>	<p>Hint: Disease outbreaks can wipe out entire colonies.</p>
<p>Scenario: New Neighbors Captive-born ferrets are released near your habitat.</p>	<p>Challenge: Will these newcomers be welcome?</p>	<p>Hint: More ferrets can mean more competition - or more mates.</p>

Play and Create: Black Footed Ferret Repopulation

Key to Genetic Characteristics

Utilizing the chart below, determine the environmental situation your ferrets face. Collaborate with your group to discuss the necessary responses and evaluate whether your ferrets can endure the circumstances.

Environmental Situation	Need Trait/Behavior	Survial Outcome

Discussion:

- If your ferrets did not survive, what characteristics might have contributed to their downfall?
- Can you think of any additional situations your ferrets could use their traits for?
- Is it possible for your population to interbreed with a neighboring population and acquire those traits in the future?

Share Ferret Love Activities

**Now that you've learned all about the Cookie Mascot for 2026,
share some Black Footed Ferret Love!**

- Implement a pledge to action (e.g., Pledge to talk to 10 people about BFFs).
- Create informational items about BFFs and share them during cookie sales, on social media, or publicly somewhere.
- Create native prairie grass seed packets to plant or give away.
- Make BFF bracelets and hand them out in your community with a piece of information about the BFFs.

