

A History of Why the Domestic Ferret is Illegal in California



How did things go so awry in California for the domestic ferret? When the Department of Fish and Game was created its mandate was wildlife. In 1933 a statute entitled, "The Importation and Transportation of Live Wild Animals" was drafted. This statute banned a host of animals which were wild and not native to the state of California. The intent of the statute was clear: to avoid problems with non-native wildlife competing with native wildlife. Fortunately for some ferret-loving Californians, much of the wildlife listed in the regulation and the one domestic species, the ferret, was allowed to be possessed only as neutered males.

Unfortunately the Department of Fish and Game banned all species of ferrets, instead of excluding the domestic ferret from the wildlife ban. The Department of Fish and Game exceeded this mandate and remains the cause of our problems today.

When the original statute was enacted in 1933, the domestic ferret was not a popular pet and its depiction as wildlife was an obvious oversight. In the 1980's, the Department of Fish and Game had requests from ferret fanciers for a relaxation of the regulation which allowed for neutered males only. Some folks actually wanted to share their household with a spayed female. Typically, when a conflict regarding an un-neutered, non-permitted male ferret would wind up in front of a judge, the owner was ordered to neuter the ferret and the Department of Fish and Game was ordered to issue a permit. Rather than taking the time to examine the issue honestly, the Department of Fish and Game began a campaign to eliminate the ferret entirely from the California. Never mind that they would roll right over our State constitution which protects a citizen's right to private property, specifically defined to include all domestic animals.

So, the Department of Fish and Game asked the California Department of Health Services, which shared the department's bias towards the ferret to write a report supporting the department ban. The report's authors later admitted to a New York vet that they believed they were specifically chosen to write a biased report because of their long established anti-ferret leanings. Objectivity was never a consideration. To no one's surprise, the report is exactly what was intended. It is prejudiced, it wildly misrepresents statistics on ferret bites and attempts to further a rabies scare which, given a grand total of 12-14 cases of rabid ferrets over a period of 300 years, can only be described as hysterical. Domestic dogs kill 17 people per year and account for hundreds of thousands of rabies cases. The Department of Fish and Game premise that owning a ferret poses a public risk that cannot be tolerated means that all dog owners in California had better be on guard for the Department of Fish and Game's intervention.

This agency's recalcitrance on the ferret issue has deeply hurt, offended and even criminalized honest citizens. It has also institutionalized the abuse of these companion animals in California. Because of this inappropriate law, criminal status is forced upon respectable California citizens who love and own ferrets and these beautiful animals are cruelly and needlessly killed each year by the orders of the Department of Fish and Game.