

Introduction to the Veterinary Profession

VETS30030 / VETS90122



Module 4 - Non-production species

Exotic and unusual pets:2

Small Mammals

Rabbits and Ferrets

Professor Anna Meredith

Anna.Meredith@unimelb.edu.au

Rabbits

- Lagomorphs
- From the Greek "lagos" = hare; "morphe" = form/likeness
- Characteristic long ears, short upturned tail or "scut", and hopping gait



Rabbits

- Over 60 breeds and 530 varieties
- Many pets are cross breeds
- Lifespan 8-12 years or more

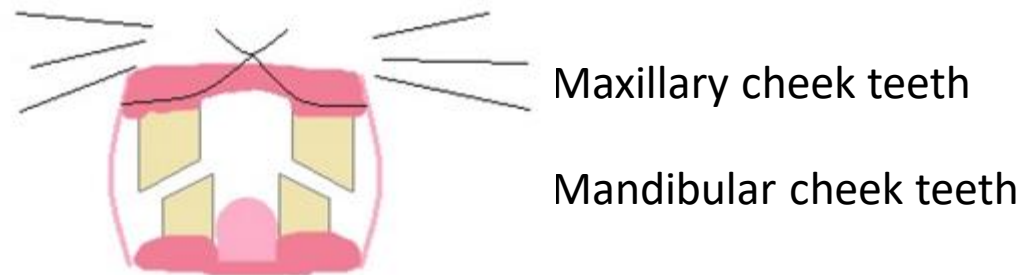


Breed to Breathe is not just for Dogs!



Rabbits - general points

- Dental formula $2/1 \ 0/0/3/2 \ 3/3$
- All teeth grow continuously
- Maxilla wider than mandible , occlusal surface slopes laterally
- Herbivorous, hind gut fermenters, very large caecum
- Coprophagic
- Dental and GI health reliant on high fibre diet



Rabbit faeces

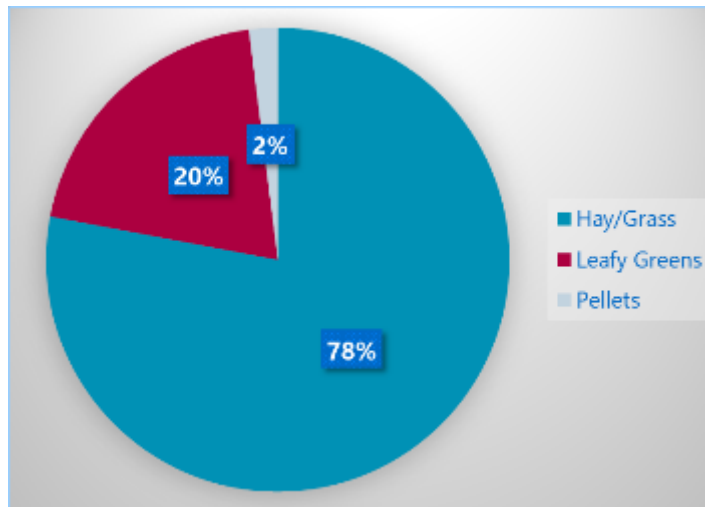
Faecal Pellets – 2 types

- Formed fibrous pellets - dry
- Caecotrophs: Fluid and soft particles
 - Product of caecal microbial fermentation
 - Highly nutritive
 1. Amino acids
 2. VFA
 3. Vitamins B and K
 - Coated in mucous
 - Expelled as soft paste in 'honey comb'
 - Pass rapidly through the colon to the anus
 - Eaten directly from anus



Rabbits

- Prey species, easily stressed
- Social animals; best in pairs or groups - form strong bonds. FN/MN or MN/MN combos work well
- *Diet*: 70-80% grass hay (Oaten) + 20-30% fresh, leafy greens + 0-5% pellets and treats (Oxbow)
- *Housing*: Variable, but need lots of room to run (time out of cage essential)



Environmental Enrichment

A Hutch is NOT Enough!



Ideally all rabbits should have a large, secure hutch or indoor cage with access to a large run to allow freedom to express natural behaviour

Substrates



- Cat litter for the latrine areas – wood based pellets is best
- Newspaper
- Dust free woodshavings, paper based e.g. Carefresh, compost soil for digging
- Hay, hay and hay!!! For eating, for bedding, for eating!
- Grass and concrete
- Carpet and laminate



Environmental Enrichment



Express natural behaviours:

- Running
- Jumping
- Standing up on hind legs
- Digging
- Chewing
- Hiding





House Rabbits

Rabbits can make good house pets and can be litter trained



However they are:

- Messy (hay)
- Destructive
 - Chewing
 - Digging

NORMAL BEHAVIOUR

House rabbits

- Secure cage for when unsupervised
- Rabbit proofing





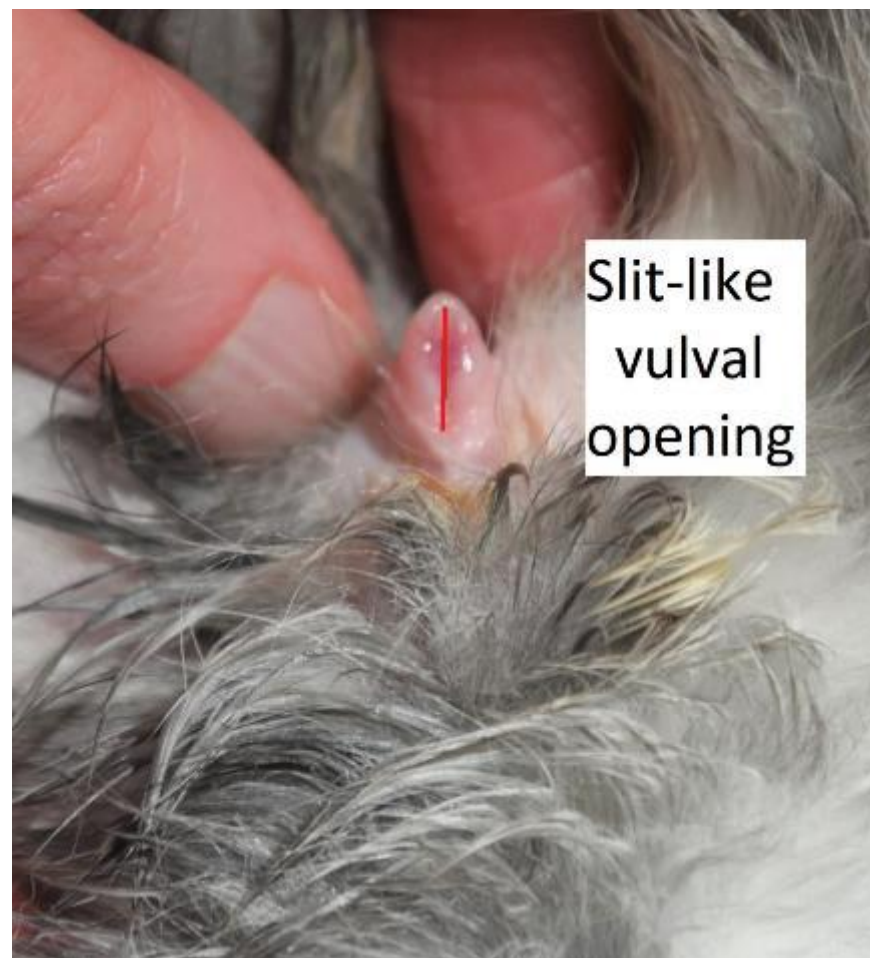
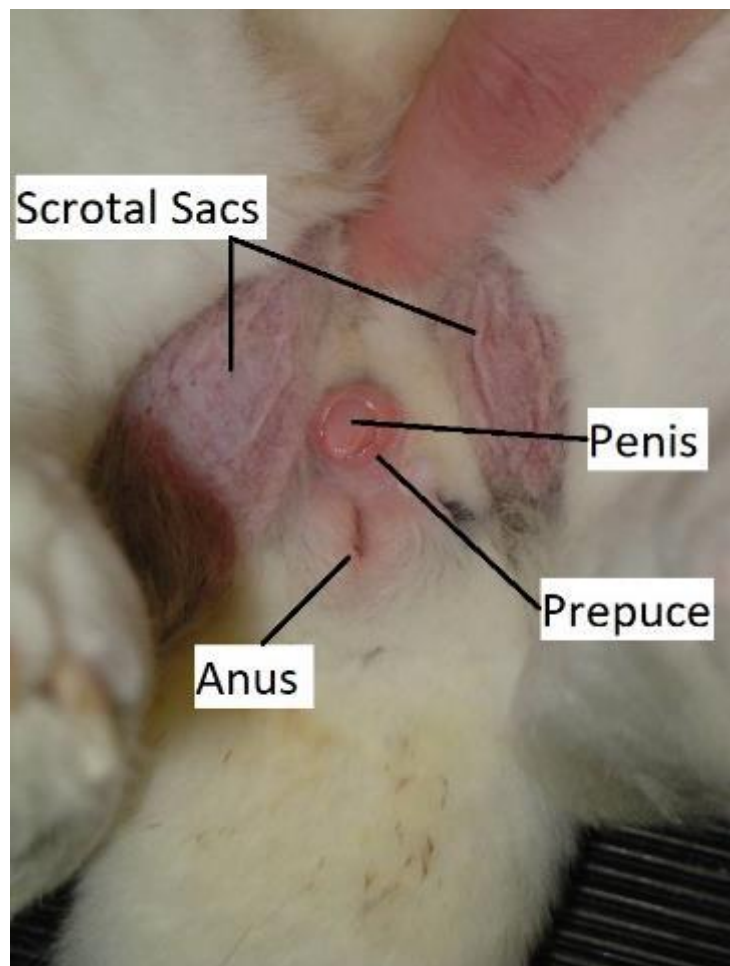
- Litter tray
- Opportunity to dig



- Hide box to sleep
- Mimics the burrow
- Allows escape from companions, humans, other pets etc



Sexing



Reproduction

- Induced ovulation
- Take doe to buck as doe very territorial
- Nest-building – pluck hair
- Altricial young; suckle for only 3-5 minutes per day



Rabbits

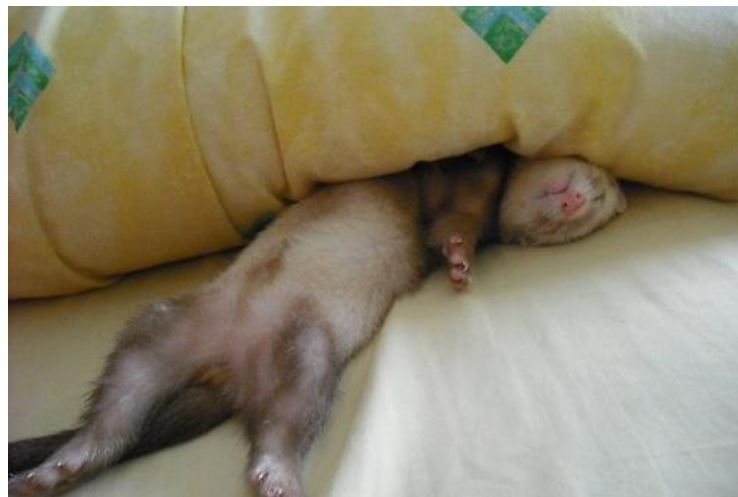
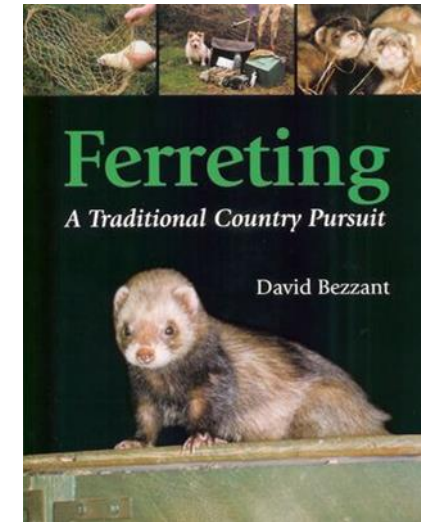
Preventative health:

- Desexing (females >2yo= uterine adenocarcinoma)
- Vaccination- Calicivirus (RHDV), currently recc 6 monthly boosters: Myxomatosis (not Australia)
- Ectoparasites- Selamectin (NB- FIPRONIL KILLS RABBITS)
- *Common diseases:*
 - Gut stasis,
 - Dental disease (congenital vs acquired)
 - Pododermatitis
 - *Encephalitozoon cuniculi* (protozoan parasite) - neurological and renal disease



Ferrets

- Domesticated European polecat
- Males= hobs, females=jills
- Used for hunting, racing, pets
- Intelligent, playful, inquisitive, sleep 18 hrs/day
- Seasonal weight and hair loss



Ferrets

- *Housing:* Outdoor – hutch or enclosure; use one area/litter tray for latrine,. Indoor – secure cage/room when unsupervised. Regular exercise
- *Diet:* Commercial dry food or whole prey. Stash food, eat frequent small meals



Control of breeding

- Prolonged oestrus if unmated - hyperoestrogenism
- Vasectomised males for sterile matings (induced ovulation).
- Surgical neutering linked to adrenal gland disease so NOT recommended.
- Hormonal neutering:
 - “Jill Jab” – proligestone – short term
 - GnRH agonist implants - males and females



Ferrets

Preventive medicine:

- Hormonal neutering (Deslorelin).
- Annual distemper vaccination
- Flea/ear mite treatment – eg Selamectin

Common diseases:

- Adrenal gland disease (if surgically neutered)
- Insulinoma
- Gastric ulcers
- Cardiomyopathy
- Lymphoma

