

Black-footed Ferret

January 2025



Meet the Cookie Mascot: An Activity Guide

Introducing the wild, wonderful world of the Black-Footed Ferret—this year's Girl Scout Cookie mascot! This vibrant, interactive digital guide is designed to inspire Girl Scouts of all ages with fun facts, conservation awareness, and cookie-selling confidence. Through games and activities, Girl Scouts will connect with this rare and resilient animal, learning how their cookie sales support big goals and meaningful change.

In this digital guide, you'll discover:

Engaging ferret facts and conservation messages.

Fun troop activities and games.

Eco-friendly project ideas and cookie booth tips.

Be brave. Be curious. Be a cookie-selling, nature-loving force for good!

Name: Black-footed ferret, often referred to as "BFF" (Best Friend Ferret).

Theme: "Brave, Fierce, and Fun!" which highlights the ferrets' resilience and encourages Girl Scouts to be their best selves during the cookie program.

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET CONSERVATION

Have you ever thought you had lost something precious forever?

It's a scary thought — the idea of something being gone never to be found again. If by some stroke of luck, you did manage to find the thing you lost, you likely worked very hard to make sure you never lost it again!

This is the story of black-footed ferrets. These black-masked little members of the weasel family were declared extinct in 1979 and considered lost to the world forever. Their numbers, once estimated at 500,000, had been decimated due to habitat destruction and the poisoning of prairie dogs (their primary prey).

Fortunately, in 1981, a shining moment of fortune appeared. A remnant population of ferrets was discovered in Meeteetse, Wyoming. However, this group of ferrets faced almost insurmountable odds when in 1985, there were outbreaks of canine distemper virus and sylvatic plague. With the population critically at risk, the last 18 black-footed ferrets were gathered and placed in a managed breeding program.

Now, through the intense efforts of a multi-institutional recovery program, the black-footed ferret population continues to improve. Your Louisville Zoo is one of the six organizations contributing to the revitalization of an entire species. The Zoo's Conservation Center has produced over 1,000 kits since 1991 and provided over 700 ferrets for reintroduction to over 21 reintroduction sites across the Great Plains. This is no small feat by any standards in the world of conservation.

To add to these efforts, In January of 2018, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums formally announced that the black-footed ferret had been added to the international Saving Animals from Extinction® (SAFE) initiative. SAFE combines the expertise of Zoo and Aquarium professionals with conservation partners in the field to increase awareness about species and the importance of saving them through collective impact and public engagement. We are honored to be a part of such an important project. To bring a species back from the brink of extinction takes vigilance, skill, insight, lots of luck and an unwavering commitment by a community of caring individuals and supportive organizations. We are all so proud of this project and hopeful for the future of black-footed ferrets.

Activity #1 – Meet the Mascot – Ferret Fun Fact Cards

Meet the Mascot – Ferret Fun Fact Cards

Take care of **business**. Print two sets and play a concentration matching game and learn all about the BFF mascot.

DENS

Black-footed ferrets live in prairie dog dens in the American grasslands and prairies.



PLAYFUL

Black-footed ferrets are flexible, love to wrestle and play chase. They are also excellent climbers.



COMMUNICATION

Black-footed ferrets are known for their squeaks, hisses and chatter. They also use dance to communicate.



BUSINESS

A group of ferrets is called a business.



NOCTURNAL

Black-footed ferrets are nocturnal, which means they are most active at night. They use their strong sense of smell to locate food and friends.



Fun Facts: Ferret, Black-Footed

Classification

Order: Carnivora

Family: Mustelidae

Genus: Mustela

Species: nigripes

RANGE

Once ranging over the great plains from southern Canada to Mexico, black-footed ferrets are now being released into Arizona, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Canada and Mexico.

HABITAT

Prairie dog towns; occupy vacant burrows.

SIZE

Adults are 18 – 24 inches (including a 5-inch tail) and weigh 1.5 – 3 pounds.

REPRODUCTION

Females breed their first spring when they are about 8 months old. Their breeding season begins in February but extends into May. Gestation period is 42 days, so kits are born from May to July. One to ten young are born in a litter (average litter size is 4 kits) and the helpless newborns spend 4 – 6 weeks in the burrow with their mother, who raises them by herself. In September the juveniles will leave their natal areas to find and establish their own territories.

DIET

Wild: Food preference is prairie dogs; if scarce, they will also eat rabbits and mice in winter and ground squirrels in summer.

Zoo: Carnivore diet, rats, mice

BEHAVIOR

These nocturnal mammals spend days sleeping and nights marking, defending, and roaming their territories, where they search for food. Like other mustelids, such as otters and weasels, they produce musk from an anal gland, used to mark their territories and for defense.

POINTS OF INTEREST

Probably spend 95% of their time underground. They survey their habitat by poking their heads out of the prairie dogs' burrows and looking in all directions. Behavior biologists call this periscoping. Active even on the coldest nights, they may travel a couple of miles and investigate between 50 and 400 burrows per night. These ferrets communicate by various types of vocalization. When frightened, they will chatter and hiss; they whimper when encouraging their young to follow.

STATUS

One of the most endangered mammals in North America. As of August 2014: 1023 ferrets born, 817 survived at the Louisville Zoo, 666 ferrets have been released into the wild from the Louisville Zoo; approximately 20 zoos now exhibit the black-footed ferret.

As of August 2014, there were 300 – 600 surviving ferrets in the wild and approximately 280 in captivity for breeding purposes.



BLACK-FOOTED FERRET



<https://louisvillezoo.org/bff-webcam/>

Welcome to the Louisville Zoo's Black-Footed Ferret Live Cam!

Meet Rhaenyra, a spirited 3-year-old black-footed ferret who joined us from the Smithsonian. She's proven to be an exceptional mother, having welcomed a litter each year since her arrival. Her last two litters each had seven kits, and we're excitedly awaiting the final count for her newest arrivals.

Rhaenyra has a few charming quirks—she loves rearranging her Alpha-dri bedding, often piling it high along the top of her enclosure. While this behavior helps wild ferret moms keep their nest boxes clean and cool, Rhaenyra does it year-round, regardless of kit season! She also enjoys shredding paper bags and curling up in oversized cardboard boxes stuffed with her handmade bedding creations.

Last year, her litter included five boys and two girls, and this time we're crossing our fingers for a more balanced mix. With the addition of our live cameras, you now have a front-row seat to the magic of black-footed ferret development, something usually reserved for our conservation team.

These little ones grow fast—nearly doubling in size daily—and reach full maturity by 90 days old. That's when they leave their mother and begin preparing for life in the wild. This critical phase, known as preconditioning, leads to their eventual release as part of the broader conservation effort. Rhaenyra and her kits are sure to keep things entertaining.

Activity #2 – Create a Habitat Diorama of a black-footed Ferret

A diorama of a black-footed ferret habitat can be made with a box and should feature both the above-ground prairie and the underground burrows where the ferrets live.

Supplies

- Shoebox or another small box
- Scissors and tape
- Construction paper in blue, green, and brown
- Modeling clay or felt in black, brown, and tan
- Small rocks and dried grass or hay
- Sticks and glue
- Optional: photos of a prairie ecosystem and animals

Instructions

1. Create the prairie landscape

1. **Set the scene:** Begin by cutting the lid off a shoebox to create an open space for the diorama.
2. **Add a sky:** Tape a piece of blue paper to the inside back and top of the box to represent the sky.
3. **Create the ground:** Place a layer of green paper on the bottom of the box for the grassy prairie ground. Crumple up small pieces of paper and place them under the green paper to create hills.
4. **Add grass and sticks:** Glue dried grass or hay to the top of the green paper. This represents the tall prairie grass where ferrets hunt. Add small sticks to represent plants or branches.

2. Build the prairie dog burrows

1. **Construct burrows:** Cut small holes in the bottom green paper to represent the openings of prairie dog burrows. Black-footed ferrets do not dig their own burrows and instead rely on the homes of prairie dogs.

2. **Add underground tunnels:** For a 3D effect, add brown paper tunnels leading into the burrows. This illustrates that the ferrets live underground.
3. Make the black-footed ferret and prairie dogs
 1. **Create the ferret:** Use modeling clay or cut pieces of felt to create a black-footed ferret. Add the signature black markings on the feet, face, and tip of the tail.
 2. **Add prairie dogs:** Model prairie dogs using brown clay or felt. Place them near the burrow entrances, as they are the ferret's main food source.
 3. **Place the animals:** Position the ferret and prairie dogs inside the diorama. Place some animals peeking out of the burrows and others on the surface of the prairie.
4. Add the finishing touches
 1. **Introduce predators:** Use clay or draw pictures of other prairie predators, such as eagles and coyotes, to show the threats that black-footed ferrets face.
 2. **Create a mountain view:** Use blue and brown construction paper to add mountains in the background, as ferrets are often found in intermountain prairies and grasslands.
 3. **Add educational details:** Add small labels to the diorama explaining the different parts of the habitat. This will help others learn about the black-footed ferret and its unique ecosystem.



Conservation in Kansas of the Black-footed Ferret

Black-footed ferret conservation in Kansas focuses on their reintroduction to western Kansas grasslands, where they were last seen in the 1950s, through efforts by groups like [Audubon of Kansas](#) and the [US Fish and Wildlife Service](#) (USFWS). Key components of conservation include protecting their prairie dog habitat, managing [sylvatic plague](#) which threatens prairie dogs, and using captive-bred ferrets from breeding centers. The success of the Kansas reintroduction is linked to private landowners and their commitment to creating healthy grasslands and prairie dog colonies, proving the species can be recovered with targeted efforts.

Key Aspects of Black-footed Ferret Conservation in Kansas

- **Reintroduction Efforts:**

Starting in 2007, the Audubon of Kansas and USFWS released ferrets onto private ranches in western Kansas, where large prairie dog towns provide necessary habitat.

- **Prairie Dog Protection:**

Black-footed ferrets rely entirely on prairie dogs for food and shelter, so protecting and managing prairie dog colonies is crucial for their recovery.

- **Habitat Management:**

The long-term success of the ferrets depends on healthy, large prairie dog colonies. Landowners' efforts in maintaining the ecological health of their lands are vital.

- **Disease Control:**

Sylvatic plague is a major threat to prairie dogs and thus to the ferrets that depend on them. Conservation groups are working on solutions like oral vaccine research to protect prairie dogs from the disease.

- **Collaborative Partnerships:**

The recovery program involves a multi-agency approach, including the USFWS, conservation groups, and private landowners who provide the essential space and expertise for reintroduction.

- **Monitoring and Research:**

Ongoing surveys are conducted to monitor the ferret population's health, reproductive success, and survival rates, providing data to refine conservation strategies.

Success Factors in Kansas

- **Private Land Stewardship:**

The commitment of multi-generational ranching families who have maintained excellent ecological grazing practices has created healthy habitats for the ferrets.

- **Favorable Conditions:**

The Kansas reintroduction site is considered one of the most successful due to the protected, healthy, and plague-free prairie dog colonies.

- **Species Recovery Success:**

The black-footed ferret is considered one of the most endangered North American mammals, and its recovery demonstrates that species can be saved with focused conservation efforts and resources.

Activity #3

A new twist on a Girl Scout Tradition: **Thin Mint S'mores**

You will need:

Roasting sticks

Marshmallows

Thin Mints (Freeze them before you go so they don't melt)

Toast your marshmallow to your taste. Take two thin mints and squish the marshmallow between. Then enjoy!!



Banana Pudding with Trefoils

Ingredients

- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1/3 cup flour
- 3 cups milk
- 3 egg yolks, whisked
- 2 tbsp butter
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- girl scout cookies (40 cookies per box)
- 4 bananas, cut into 1/4" slices



Instructions

1. In a saucepan, whisk together the sugar and flour. Pour in the milk and cook over medium heat until the mixture has thickened for about 10 minutes.
2. In a separate bowl with whisked egg yolks, add a small amount of the hot milk mixture to the eggs and stir well. Add the egg yolks into the saucepan, whisking well. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove

from heat and add your butter and vanilla extract. Allow the mixture to cool for 10 minutes.

3. In an ungreased 8"x8" baking dish, layer 1/2 of the Trefoils shortbread cookies on the bottom (about 16 cookies), followed by 1/2 of the sliced bananas and 1/2 of the pudding. Repeat the layers, ending with pudding on top.
4. Place some plastic wrap directly on top of the banana pudding and refrigerate overnight. When serving, top with crushed Trefoils shortbread cookie crumbs if desired. Enjoy!

Peanut Butter Patties Caramel Turtles

Ingredients

- 2 milk chocolate bars
- 6 caramel candies
- 30 pecan halves
- 6 Girl Scout Peanut Butter Patties® Girl Scout Cookies



Instructions

Preheat oven to 250 degrees.

Break each chocolate bar into four pieces. Place each piece 2 inches apart on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Top each with one piece of caramel candy.

Bake 5 to 7 minutes or until caramel just starts to soften.

Immediately press one pecan half on one side of the caramel for the turtle's head, then press four pecan halves onto each corner for the turtle's legs. Place one Peanut Butter Patties Girl Scout Cookie on top of each candy and press down. Let the cookie sit for several minutes to set.

Activity #4 – The Maze of Life

Description: Black-footed ferrets have many physical and behavioral adaptations to help them survive in the temperate grasslands habitat.

1. Hand out one of each of the following pages the questions (block the answers at the bottom of the page) and the Maze of Life.
2. Have the girls research the questions on-line.
3. Each correct answer will lead you on the correct path to the next number, if you get it wrong you will have come back and pick a different path.
4. BFF (Black Footed Ferret) is the last place you will reach to get to the end. You will have to figure out which way is the correct way to make it to the finish.

Answer the following questions about the Black-footed ferret to guide you in the maze!

1. Black-footed ferrets are the only ferrets native to North America. They evolved from *where* 30,000 - 45,000 years ago.

- A. Europe
- B. Africa
- C. Siberia



2. One of the reasons the black-footed ferret became extinct in the wild was because...

- A. Hunting
- B. Lack of food & habitat
- C. They moved back to Siberia

3. Black-footed ferrets are being reintroduced in which National Park?

- A. Grasslands National Park, Canada
- B. Prince Albert National Park, Canada
- C. Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada



4. The black-footed ferrets are part of the Mustelid family that includes weasels, mink, badgers, otters, and...

- A. Prairie Dogs
- B. Wolverines
- C. Squirrels

5. Black-footed ferrets have evolved to hunt with their...

- A. Sharp claws
- B. Strong jaw
- C. Strong tail

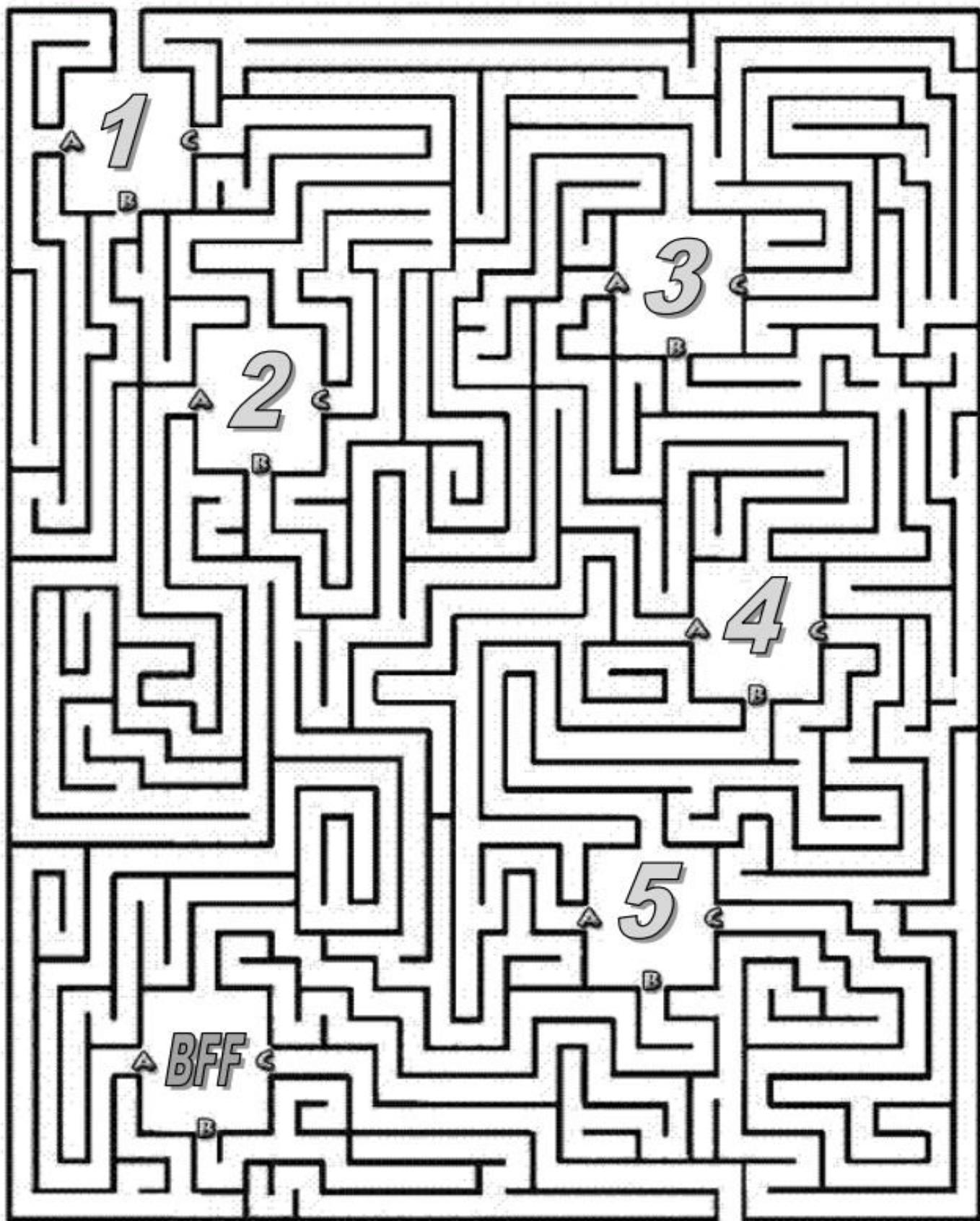


1.C 2.B 3.A 4.B 5.B BFF. C

The Maze of Life

Use the clues to find your way to the finish line.

Start



Finish

Activity # 4 – Black Footed Ferret Cootie Catcher

What You Need:

- 1 square piece of paper (8.5x8.5 inches works well)
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Scissors (if you need to trim your paper into a square)

Folding Instructions:

1. Print the Black-footed Ferret Cootie Catcher for each girl.

2. Fold into quarters:

Cut off the top section of your paper at the “cut here”.

3. Flip and fold again:

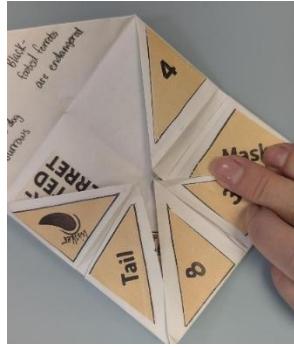
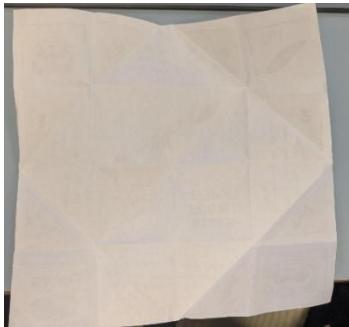
Turn the paper over and fold all corners into the center again.

4. Turn paper over and fold the corners to the center.

5. Fold in half

Fold your square in half both ways to crease it well in both directions.

Slide your fingers under the flaps to make your cootie catcher pop open!



How to play the cootie catcher game!

1. **Pick out a picture/number** and open and close the cootie catcher the amount of times listed above the animal (older kids could skip that number if they chose and instead open and close it based on the number of letters it takes to spell the picture they picked)
2. **Pick a visible number**, then open and close the cootie catcher that amount of times.
3. **Pick a visible number again.**
4. **Open the flap and read** the prompt under the corresponding flap!

Cut here



Paws

Tail

Ferrets
sleep up to
21 hours a day



Do your
best ferret
wiggle dance



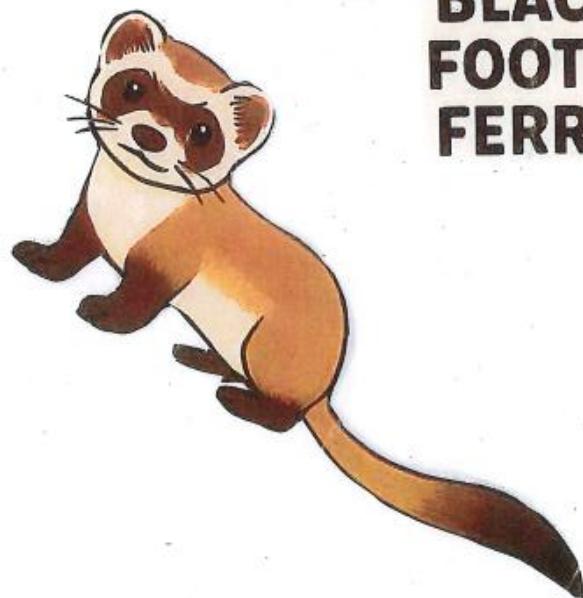
Ferret

8

Ferrets
are nocturnal
they hunt at
night

3

Ferret face
a silly



BLACK-FOOTED FERRET

Tail

Ferrets
live in
Prairie dog
Burrows

2

Black-
footed ferrets
are endangered

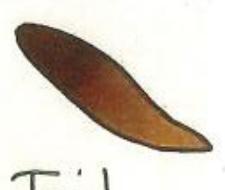


Mask

Mask

Ferrets
were once
thought to be
sneaky
say
sneaky ferrets
three times fast
exhibit

4



Tail

Girl Scout Conservation Guide

Aligned with Girl Scout (Daisy–Cadette) Badge Requirements

What Is Conservation?

Conservation means protecting plants, animals, and the places they live. Girl Scouts help care for nature, learn about ecosystems, and take action to protect wildlife.

Badge Alignment Overview

Daisies – *Eco Learner*

- Learn how to protect nature.
- Practice safe outdoor behaviors.
- Discover ways to help plants and animals.

Brownies – *Outdoor Art Creator / Eco Friend*

- Observe nature closely.
- Learn how to reduce impact outdoors.
- Create art inspired by wildlife.

Juniors – *Animal Habitats*

- Learn about wild animal homes.
- Explore local habitats.
- Create a plan to protect a habitat.

Cadettes – *Trees / Night Owl / Outdoor Art Apprentice*

- Study the role of trees in ecosystems.
- Explore nocturnal wildlife.
- Understand the impact of human actions.

Conservation Lesson Flow (Multi-Level)

1. Discover: What Do Animals Need?

- Food
- Water
- Shelter
- Space

Activity: Match-an-Animal Homes Worksheet or "Design-A-Habitat" drawing.

2. Explore: Why Do Some Animals Become Endangered?

- Habitat loss
- Pollution
- Climate change
- Overhunting or invasive species

Group Discussion Prompt: "What would happen if your home disappeared?"

3. Investigate: Local Wildlife in Kansas & Missouri

Examples:

- **Bald eagle**
- **Black-footed ferret**
- **Prairie chicken**
- **Monarch butterfly**
- **Big brown bat**

Activity: Wildlife Detective Mystery — youth use clue cards to identify threatened animals.

Station 2: Food Chain Bracelets

Bead colors:

- Yellow: Sun
- Green: Plant

- Blue: Insect
- Red: Bird
- Black: Predator

Girls build a food chain and explain each link.

Take Action Projects

Each level can complete these for a Journey or Take Action requirement.

Daisies: Plant flowers for pollinators or make animal-friendly signs for parks.

Brownies: Create a "Leave No Trace" poster campaign.

Juniors: Build and install a pollinator garden or create wildlife habitat boxes.

Cadettes: Map local trees, identify species, and advocate for tree protection or planting.

Endangered Animal Trading Cards

Create your own cards for fun and learning. Each card should include:

- Animal Name
- Picture / Illustration
- Habitat
- Threats
- One-way humans can help protect it

Example Cards:

1. **Black-footed Ferret** – Grasslands, Threat: habitat loss, Help: prairie restoration
2. **Monarch Butterfly** – Flower meadows, Threat: milkweed loss, Help: plant milkweed
3. **Bald Eagle** – Forests/rivers, Threat: pollution, Help: protect waterways
4. **River Otter** – Wetlands, Threat: water pollution, Help: clean streams
5. **Prairie Chicken** – Grasslands, Threat: farming & development, Help: preserve prairie

Girls can trade cards, quiz each other, or create a full deck for their troop activities.

Kids in Kansas can learn about animal conservation through hands-on experiences at **Tanganyika Wildlife Park** (feeding rhinos, swimming with penguins), educational programs at the **Sedgwick County Zoo** (citizen science, habitat building), and exploring native species at state nature centers like the **Great Plains Nature Center**, plus programs at the **Konza Prairie** and **Kansas Wetlands Education Center**. Home-based activities include learning about local wildlife at the **Kansas Humane Society** or using KDWP resources.

Conservation Pledge

"I will respect wildlife, protect nature, and take action to help my planet every day."

Coming soon: Girl Scout Day at the Zoo March 28th, 2026

Treat your Girl Scout to a special adventure! Join us for Girl Scout Day at the Zoo as we celebrate the end of cookie season with fun activities and our cookie mascot, the black-footed ferret. Explore the zoo, make memories, and cap off cookie season in the wildest way possible!

Confirmed Zoos participating:

Sedgwick County Zoo-Wichita \$8.50 a ticket 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Brit Spaugh Zoo-Great Bend Free Entry 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

Rolling Hills Zoo-Salina Girls \$6, Adults \$16 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Pending Confirmation:

David Traylor Zoo-Emporia

Lee Richardson Zoo-Garden City



Zoo visit patch will be available in council stores after the event. A limited number of zoo patches will be available so make sure to get yours.