



Our Wildlife Heritage

WYOMING'S BFF, THE BLACK-FOOTED FERRET

Black-footed ferrets are one of the most endangered mammals in the world. In fact, until about thirty years ago, scientists thought these ferrets were extinct. Have you heard the story of the black-footed ferret's rediscovery and recovery?

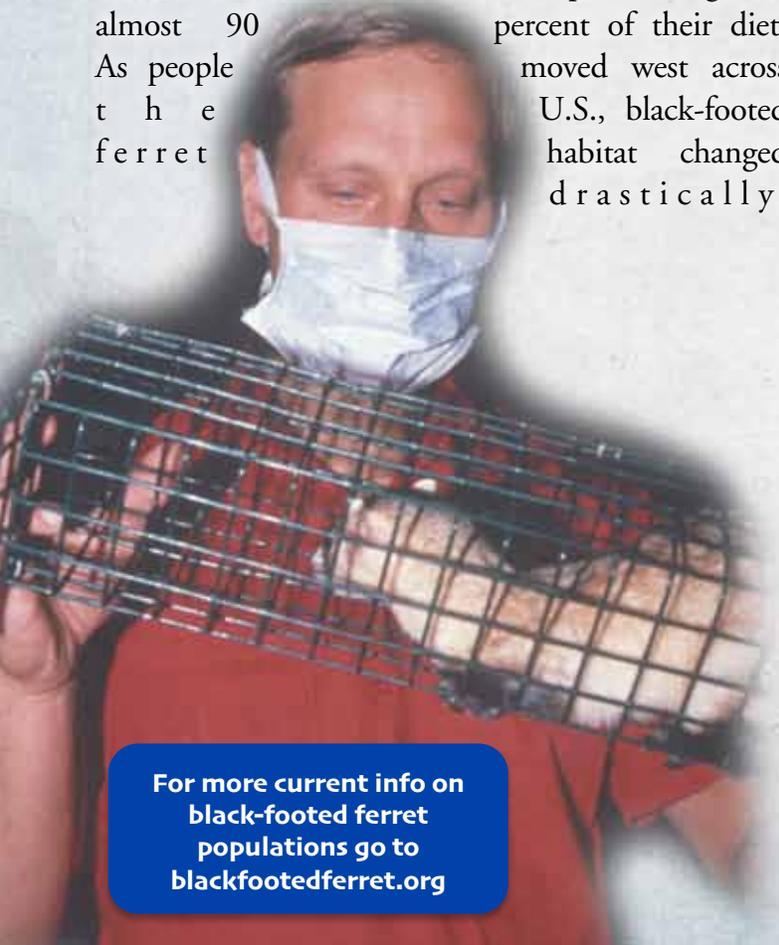
Black-footed ferrets made their homes across the United States prairies, including Wyoming, and ate prairie dogs for almost 90 percent of their diet. As people moved west across the U.S., black-footed ferret habitat changed drastically.

Settlers plowed the land to plant crops for food, grazed cattle and sheep on the prairie grasses and poisoned unwanted wildlife species like coyotes, foxes and badgers. The prairie dog towns that the black-footed ferrets depended on were destroyed, and black-footed ferret populations were destroyed too. By 1974, biologists thought the ferret was probably extinct.

But, lucky for the black-footed ferret, a farm dog named Shep found a ferret in 1981 near Meeteetse, Wyoming. The rancher could not identify the animal Shep had brought home, so he called a taxidermist. The taxidermist realized it was the very rare black-footed ferret and contacted wildlife professionals.

Biologists found another 130 ferrets living outside of Meeteetse and used that colony to learn more about the life history and behavior of these secretive mammals. When disease killed all but 18 of these ferrets, wildlife officials took the surviving ferrets into captivity to try and save the species.

Survival of the black-footed ferret was important because they are part of our natural history and wildlife heritage. From those 18 ferrets captured long ago, about 1,000 ferrets now live in the wild. Each year, 140 to 150 young ferrets are released into the wild in 19 reintroduction sites, including Wyoming! For a species believed to have disappeared, that's one incredible tale of survival.



For more current info on
black-footed ferret
populations go to
blackfootedferret.org