

A GUIDE TO

Ferret control

Fussy and fickle

This guide focuses on ferret control and assumes you're familiar with general predator control advice. For more general guidance, visit predatorfreenz.org.



Acknowledgements:

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Understanding ferrets

Ferrets are the largest introduced mustelid species in New Zealand, which means they can take on larger prey – including adult kiwi.

Ferrets have a golden undercoat, with dark-tipped hairs and a dark tail. Their cream-coloured face has a black eyemask. They can grow to the size of a small cat and are focused hunters, with strong preferences for particular prey species. Trapping them can be challenging – learning their behaviour, habits, and travel routes, and adapting regularly, will help you catch them.

Behaviour insights

- **Nocturnal:** Ferrets are mostly active at night, so use trail cameras to see what they're up to after dark.
- **Highway travellers:** Ferrets can be very specific, using the same narrow travel paths repeatedly. Key routes include bush edges, fence lines, roads, walking tracks, along waterways and around wetlands. Place cameras and traps along these routes.
- **Hard to please:** Ferrets can be incredibly fussy and have a short attention span. Make traps as appealing as possible to catch (and hold) a ferret's attention.
- **Strong sniffers:** Ferrets have poor eyesight and rely on scent to hunt their prey, so make use of ground scents like blood trails to bring them to your traps. Once at the trap site, use the scent of other animals to lure them inside.
- **On a mission:** They strongly focus on getting from A to B and don't tend to explore widely. Use scent lures to intercept this travel style.
- **Fast!** They can appear dopey and lethargic at times, but can move with amazing speed and coordination when hunting. Don't be fooled!
- **Water-averse:** Despite often living in wetland and river habitats, they will run along water edges and look for dry crossings. Place traps on level, dry crossings like bridges, which they prefer to logs, as ferrets are poor climbers.
- **Flexible home range:** Ferrets have been recorded dispersing up to 45km, so even if you don't have ferrets now, they may turn up later. Set ferret traps if you know they are in neighbouring areas. Home range varies significantly with population density and food supply. If prey is abundant and/or population density is high, the ferrets' home range will decrease; increase trap density in this zone.

Lures: Big and bloody

Fresh meat lures, in large chunks, and blood scent trails are most effective for catching ferrets. Use their preferred prey of rabbits and hares. Ferrets also hunt chicks, adult birds, rodents, frogs and occasionally possums. Recreate what they are already naturally feeding on and stick with tried and true lures.

Top lures

- Rabbit, hare, chicken, possum (leave the skin on to add more natural scent and make it more attractive)
- Red meat such as beef and venison
- Use big chunks (at least 50mm x 50mm) to create natural, highly attractive lures

Top tips

- The most important aspect of any lure for ferrets is blood. The bloodier and fresher the bait, the better.
- Change lure monthly at a minimum.
- Maintain scuffed fresh earth at trap ends, as the scent is highly interesting to ferrets.

Social lures

When a ferret is not hungry, they can be drawn in by the social cues of other animals. Ferrets are natural trackers and will follow ground scent: the right lure can hold their attention long enough to guide them into a trap.

Lure ferrets with scent:

- Above a trap, hang a freshly caught ferret or stoat as a wind scent.
- Outside the trap, drag a freshly caught mustelid or rabbit carcass and/or their blood along the ground to lay a trail.
- Inside a trap, take a freshly killed ferret or stoat and rub the back end around the box interior (the anus area contains scent glands).
- Some research facilities have captive ferrets and can provide their bedding and faeces for you to use as scented lure.

Note:

- **During mating season** (August – September), male ferrets appear to be equally interested in male scent as females. Male sex pheromones last longer in the environment than females.
- **Don't clean** traps too thoroughly after you've caught a ferret or stoat. Remove debris, but the blood and residual scent will attract others.

Traps: Types, placement and timing

This guide includes kill traps and live capture traps. Cage trapping (live capture) is currently the most effective removal tool for ferrets, but requires investing time in careful placement and detailed luring.

Create a foundational network of kill traps and then use live capture traps at key times of year e.g. from February – April when young ferrets are dispersing.

Kill traps

Kill traps are instant and effective to target multiple species, but ferrets may be reluctant to enter. Scuff up fresh earth at trap ends and use blood lures to create interest.

Recommended kill trap

- **The stainless steel DOC 250** in a wooden trap box is a quality long-term choice. They are robust, durable and also ideal for targeting Norway rats, ship rats, hedgehogs and stoats.



Tips

Entrances and internal baffle holes must be no larger than 80mm x 80mm. Entrance holes must be offset as per [DOC specifications](#).

- The maximum set-off weight is 120g: test 'spring-off weight' before use.
- Smooth mesh entrances and ensure the box does not wobble. Manage grass and dig fresh earth at the entrances to ensure sight and smell travel through the box.
- Use a setting tool for increased leverage and safety when setting the DOC 250.



Important

In areas where kea or weka are present, please contact your local DOC office for modifications to DOC 250 tunnel designs e.g. longer box lengths, side entrances and metal fittings. Check the [DOC trap box dimensions for non-target species online](#).

Live capture traps

Cage traps are an effective method for removing ferrets and other predator, such as feral cats. However, it's a legal requirement to check them daily (within 12 hours of sunrise). These traps depends on your location, available time, and capacity to manage a live animal in a cage. Remote monitoring technology (smart sensor nodes) can reduce the need to manually check all traps.

Any ferrets caught in live capture traps must be dispatched humanely (shot by a licensed shooter). Be aware if kea, kiwi, weka or other ground-dwelling birds are in your project area, they may enter your cage trap. Place the traps in the shade and check them early on hot summer days.

Note: When working in residential areas, consider the risk of trapping companion cats: they are important pets, and their safety is crucial to maintain social license for your trapping. Keep local communities updated with your activities. Scan for microchips and check for a collar before assuming a cat is feral. In public or recreational areas, keep traps out of sight. Trapped animals, especially cats, can be distressing to see or hear.



Recommended cage traps:

- **Pestgard tunnel trap (double entrance):** A robust and long-lasting cage trap, with two doors and a rigid treadle plate for a fast trigger system.
- **Pestgard medium trap (collapsible):** Smaller and lighter than the double-entrance trap, and can be collapsed for transporting, but only has one entrance.
- **Tāwhiti Smart Cage:** A double entrance cage trap with an optional sensor to detect when the trap has triggered and send out a message. The autolure is long-lasting, but blood meat lures will work better for ferrets.

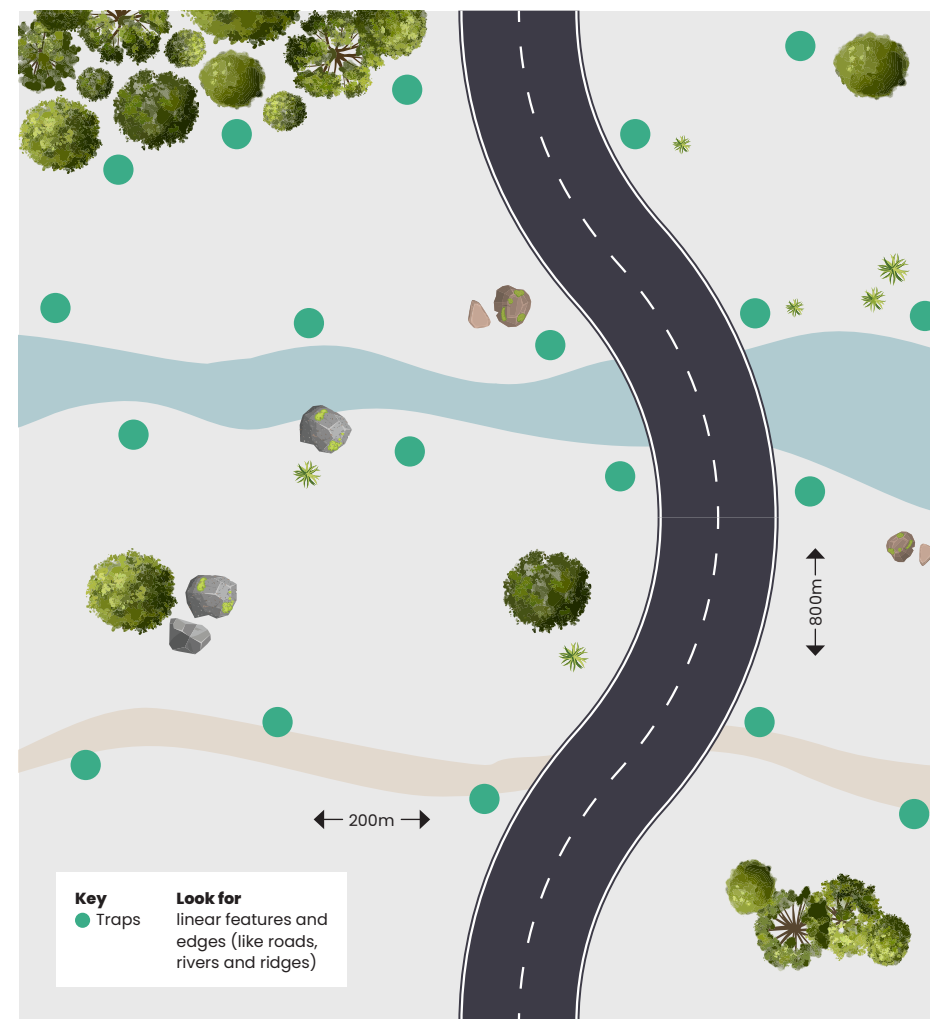
Top tips

- Intermittently use cage traps at sites where DOC 250s have been particularly successful, also during dispersal months (February - April) and mating seasons (August - September). Leave out for at least five nights at each site, but check daily.
- Cover the trap floor mesh with leaf litter, fresh earth, grass or pine needles (whatever is already outside the trap). Extend across the treadle plate (ensure the trap door can still shut quickly and easily). Add more on top of the trap to shade the lure and reduce interference from hawks.
- To discourage ferrets or birds from interacting with the lure from outside cage traps, place vegetation and logs along the external walls (and around the end if single-entrance). This will encourage ferrets towards the entrance instead.

Trap density and grid

Trap placement along high travel routes is key for ferrets; a grid structure is far less useful.

Test what works and move traps around to find the best spots. Consider placement down to the metre: if the trap isn't in the ferret's direct path, they'll miss it. Knowledge of your land will go a long way. Use trail cameras to identify favoured routes and hot spots, then place your traps there.





Recommended locations

- **Think linear:** Place traps along rivers (waterways, bridges), ridges and spurs, roads (tracks and trails).
- **Think edges:** Don't set traps in open ground or even a few metres from cover, ensure they are right at the edge of bushline.
- **Utilise structures:** Prioritise placing traps hard up against or on structures and features e.g. bush edges, fence lines and farm buildings.
- **Where rabbit and hare populations are high,** you'll often find ferrets. Ferrets are comfortable hunting below ground and can target active warrens. Place traps along linear and edge landscape features nearby.

Tips

- Prioritise areas that will channel the ferret to the trap site. Consider setting traps at intersections of routes, or bottlenecks, such as bridges, or where a track narrows and runs up against a bluff.
- In bush country, saddles can be the highest-performing trap sites.
- If a track is narrow and infrequently used: set the trap right in the middle: ferrets will choose the path of least resistance. For wider or busier tracks, cover both sides by alternating traps along each edge.
- Use logs or branches to create a natural funnel, guiding a ferret's path towards a trap entrance.
- Ensure the trap is on the ground and not raised, as ferrets will often go around something to avoid going over it.

Recommended density

Identify good landscape features first, then aim for even coverage of those features rather than simple grid or line placement. Covering the ferret habitat and high travel routes is more important than focusing on precise trap density. Gaps in your network are ok if there are no landscape features there (for example, open paddocks can remain untrapped).

- As a good starting point, aim for at least one trap per eight hectares, so each home range has at least one well-placed, easily encounterable trap.
- When placing traps along linear features such as a road, space them no more than 200 meters apart.
- After finding one good landscape feature, look for the next within 800 metres to maintain even coverage.

Tips

- If your traps are not catching anything, consider moving them to a new spot, up to 50m away.
- At high-catch sites, cluster additional traps.
- A buffer zone of 2–3km beyond your control area helps defend against re-invading ferrets. Consider key travel routes leading into your control area, such as roads, rivers, and bridges.



Trap checking frequency

How frequently you check your traps depends on population numbers, seasons, and type of trap.

- Cage traps — must be checked daily.
- Inspect kill traps monthly at a minimum.
- Increase to fortnightly during juvenile ferret dispersal season (summer/autumn: February - April), and again in late winter/spring for mating season.

