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For more Information  
Contact: Katie Gray  
Supervisor, Public Relations  
(416) 392-5941



## **TORONTO ZOO BORN FERRETS RELEASED IN GRASSLANDS NATIONAL PARK**

### **Species at risk program a continued success**

**Grasslands National Park, Saskatchewan, October 19, 2011** – For the third year in a row, 15 captive bred black-footed ferrets, some born and raised at the Toronto Zoo, were released in the wilds of Grasslands National Park. Since their first reintroduction in 2009, these tiny – yet resilient – creatures have captured the hearts of Canadians and inspired volunteers and partners to dedicate an astonishing 4000 hours of night-time survey effort monitoring the elusive animals.

Re-establishing populations of native animals once extinct requires dedication, expertise and time of several partners. Toronto Zoo conservation experts participated with Parks Canada, Calgary Zoo and the Saskatchewan Ministry of the Environment in the recovery strategy as well as national and international conservation partners towards restoring a fully functioning prairie ecosystem.

Since their reintroduction, this once extirpated native species has been closely monitored by Parks Canada biologists, dedicated partners and Canadian volunteers from across the country. This year, Grassland ferret trackers had the unique experience of spotting three new ferret families on three different prairie dog colonies. The discovery of new families is confirming how quickly the ferrets are adapting to their new home on the Canadian prairie.

"We are thrilled with the success of the recovery. We have confirmed that black-footed ferrets born at the Zoo are surviving, healthy, and reproducing in the prairie wilderness," said Dr. Graham Crawshaw, Toronto Zoo Senior Veterinarian. "It demonstrates the value of the common goals of the Zoo and Parks Canada in returning threatened animal species to their native habitat."

The Toronto Zoo's Canadian black-footed ferret conservation breeding facility has been supporting international ferret recovery in the USA and Mexico for the past 19 years, when a handful of the species, thought to be extinct, was discovered in Wyoming. Since joining the ferret Recovery Team, the Toronto Zoo has been undertaking black-footed ferret research into areas including semen freezing, analysis of estrous cycles, diets, and other vital issues. In 2004, the Toronto Zoo spearheaded Canadian recovery efforts and has participated in ferret releases and monitoring in the USA and Mexico and has assisted Parks Canada, the Saskatchewan Ministry of the Environment, and the Calgary Zoo in habitat assessment and in studies of the ferrets' food species, black-tailed prairie dogs.

"Saving species at risk is only possible through partner collaboration and the success of international ferret recovery demonstrates how working together can have a big impact on saving critically endangered species" says Maria Franke, Curator of Mammals at the Toronto Zoo. "After being gone for close to 70 years, black-footed ferrets are back home on the Canadian prairie".

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