



**Press Release
For Immediate Release
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RETURN OF THE NATIVE Bringing Black-Footed Ferrets Back Home to Canada

June 26, 2009, Toronto, Ontario: Today at the Toronto Zoo, Peter Kent, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (Americas) and MP for Thornhill, Ontario, announced approval of the Black-Footed Ferret Recovery Strategy in Canada under the Species at Risk Act. Minister Kent also announced that the black-footed ferrets will finally return to the wilds of Grasslands National Park, near Val Marie, Saskatchewan this coming October. It's a homecoming that has been almost thirty years in the making as the black-footed ferret has been extinct in their Canadian homeland for several decades.

Partners of the Black-Footed Ferret Recovery Strategy include the Toronto Zoo, Parks Canada, the Calgary Zoo, the World Wildlife Fund U.S., the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (U.S.F.W.S.), the Black-footed Ferret Recovery Implementation Team, Saskatchewan Environment, Fish and Wildlife, Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalisation, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, announced the Recovery Strategy for the Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) in Canada, and the Management Plan for the Black-tailed Prairie Dog in Canada.

Black-footed ferrets, the only ferret native to North America, were considered extinct until a small colony was discovered in Wyoming in the 1980's. At this point, an international captive breeding effort began, involving six facilities, including the Toronto Zoo. Since 1992, the Toronto Zoo has raised hundreds of kits and over 70% of them have been returned to the wild in the United States and Mexico. Now it's time to re-introduce the species to its homeland in Canada, historically southern Saskatchewan and Alberta, where they were once an integral component of the prairies.

While researchers are uncertain about the reasons for the dramatic decline of this species, it is connected to the adaptation of the prairies for ranching, leading to the disappearance of the ferrets' prey species, the black-tailed prairie dog.

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Grasslands National Park was chosen because of its habitat for black-tailed prairie dogs, the ferrets' prey species. The ferrets to be released will have been born at the Toronto Zoo in the spring of 2009, but the re-introduction is an international effort with both the United States and Mexico being involved. Many years of planning have gone into the Canadian re-introduction and it is highly anticipated by all the countries concerned. The ceremonial release will involve representatives from Parks Canada, the Canadian public and the key partners.

Following the release the well-being of the black-footed ferrets will be monitored by staff of Toronto Zoo, Grasslands National Park, researchers from the Calgary Zoo, and members of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (U.S.F.W.S).

With a survival success rate of 20%, it will be an uphill battle to reintroduce them to the Canadian prairies, where they were once an important part of the ecosystem. However, it is a battle worth the effort. Canada's natural prairies are part of our national heritage. Re-establishing the Black-footed Ferret is an important step in restoring their ecological integrity. It will be a Canadian success story of which all Canadians can be proud.

Leading up to the ferret's release back into Canada in October, there are a series of events planned at the Grasslands National Park, the Calgary Zoo and the Toronto Zoo. In addition, a number of educational opportunities are being planned, such as an 'Ask a Scientist' live video-chat hosted by Parks Canada Agency at Grasslands National Park.

An information package containing fact sheets, posters, pictures, etc. 2009. Information about the release, pictures of the young kits, details of their journey from the Toronto Zoo to Grasslands National Park and more will also be available online at www.pc.gc.ca/grasslands and torontozoo.com

Please visit the Species at Risk Act Public Registry www.sararegistry.gc.ca for more information on the Black-footed Ferret and other Species at Risk in Canada. To see a black-footed ferret up close, visit "Jefferson" in the Toronto Zoo's Americas Pavilion.

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Current Zoo Hours and Admission Prices – Please note our hours have changed

Zoo Hours – 9am to 7:30 pm. Last admissions one hour before closing. General Admission 13-64 incl. is \$21, Children 3 and under are free, Children 4-12 are \$13 and Seniors 65+ are \$15. Parking is \$8. **Events subject to change without notice.** The Zoo is located at Meadowvale Road and Hwy. 401, Exit 389 east and west bound. For general information, call (416) 392-5929. The Toronto Zoo is open year round (except December 25th).

torontozoo.com