



Jill Jabs etc

The jill is seasonally polyoestrous starting in March and lasting till about September the use of artificial light and a good plane of nutrition may bring the jill into season before March. Ferrets are well known for reproductive disorders the main two problems being Oestrogen induced anaemia and pyometra. Oestrogen induced (aplastic) anaemia is as a result of the high levels of oestrogen produced by the ferret while in prolonged oestrus when not mated. This is generally a life threatening disease and treatment is largely unsuccessful. Pyometra is a relatively uncommon disease where the uterus becomes infected and again can be life threatening. Treat is by surgery to remove the infected uterus as soon as possible, antibiotics are unsuccessful in the treatment of this disease. It is very important therefore that seasons are controlled in the ferret as the long term implications of allowing a ferret to go through normal seasons each year unmated are very serious indeed. The main forms of control are listed below with a comment on each of them.

Hormonal control.

The main drug used in the prevention of oestrous in the ferret is Proligestone (Delvosteron by Intervet UK) given subcutaneously in March and repeated if the jill returns to oestrous. In over 90% the jill will return to oestrous the next year and can be bred from. In surveys no cases of pyometra have been associated with the use of this drug. The injection can be painful and cases of skin reaction have been observed following its use it is advised that the site be well massaged after injection. The standard dosage for proligestone is 0.5ml/kg (50mg/kg).

Most jills have few or no reactions other than to come out of season within a week or two. This can be seen by the gradual reduction in the swelling of the vulva which can become wrinkled looking until it reaches normal size. However, it seems some jills do have some reactions. Occasionally the vulva may develop small sores or patches of dryness as it reduces. This is not serious but you do need to guard against infection, so a little mildly medicated cream (Sudacrem is good, after all it's supposed to be for nappy rash!) to help the healing process is advisable.

A minority of jills can be a bit knocked about by the jill jab, becoming lethargic and, whilst not exactly ill, definitely showing a loss of their usual bounce and sparkle. Providing they are eating OK, have no temperature or discharge or other signs of illness (in which case they would need a visit to the vet), this seems to wear off over a few weeks.

Jill jabs can also, in some jills, bring about a coat change, becoming dry at first and then going through quite a heavy moult. Again, this tends to sort itself out but a vitamin supplement is useful if this happens. Jills who become lethargic after a jill jab do seem to be the ones most prone to coat changes.

Exactly why some jills react and others don't is uncertain. It may be related to age, how long they were in season before the jab, or their general health up to the time they came into season. There may also be a link with the level of drug dosage given. The standard dosage for proligestone is 0.5ml/kg (50mg/kg). Given that some jills are very small, maybe even less than 0.5 kg, it is always worth weighing your jill to make sure the dose is reduced to suit her weight.



Spaying.

This is a complete ovariohysterectomy and results in the jill permanently having no further seasons and no oestrogen induced anaemia or pyometra. With the current anaesthetics and techniques this is the preferred option for all pet ferrets. Obviously this is not an option for any ferret keeper wishing to breed from those individuals but certainly is the best option for the average pet ferret.

Pyometra

Three cases of pyometra have been sent in. This is a condition of entire jills in which the uterus (womb) becomes infected and filled with pus. If left untreated it is usually fatal.

Two of the cases sent to me involved jills taken into rescues and assumed to have been left in season for some months resulting in post-oestrous anaemia. Both were lethargic and clearly unwell; one had a temperature of 105 degrees and unpleasant smelling dark discharge from her vulva. Veterinary examination revealed that both jills had an enlarged uterus. They underwent emergency spay surgery to remove the infected uteruses and given antibiotics to clear residual infection. Happily both jills recovered and went on to new homes.

A third jill had been mated to a vasectomised hob and went on to show signs of a phantom pregnancy. On the 42nd day after mating she seemed unwell and by day 44 had a high temperature, was drinking a lot and had a dark red discharge from her vulva. Once again an emergency spay was required. It should be said that the pyometra was not directly due to being mated to a vasectomised hob rather than infection setting in during the phantom pregnancy. However, repeated mating of jills to vasectomised hobs are associated with a higher incidence of pyometra, so if your jill is never to be bred from it is probably better for her to be spayed since any complications that arise through mating to a vasectomised hob will probably mean an emergency spay anyway, so why not have it done once and for all while she is fit and healthy?

Please do keep an eye on entire jills. If they seem unwell, lethargic, have a temperature, drink excessively or show any discharge from the vulva, treat it very seriously and get to a vet immediately.

Spaying after jill-jabs

A frequently related question is when to spay a jill after she has had a jill jab. Like many who take in rescues we are usually faced with the jills arriving in full season during the spring and summer months. Providing the jill is fit and well, some vets are happy to spay while she is in season, and we have tended to do this wherever possible. However, many vets simply don't like spaying while the jill is in season and prefer to give a jill-jab first and book the surgery for later. The question is how long after the jill-jab should you wait. In theory, anytime from 2-3 weeks after the jill-jab should be OK since she will have come out of season. In practice, some jills seem less perky and up to the surgery after the jill jab. Whether this has any measurable impact on how well she copes with the op, or how she recovers is a bit debateable. Some people report that their jills take the operation less well than they should. I also have had jills who were spayed a few weeks after a jill jab that have had more problems getting over it. However, I've also had jills for whom it simply hasn't seemed to make any difference. For what it's worth, my views now are that if the jill jab is given very early in the year, leave her for as long as you can, a month if possible. If the jill-jab is given later in the year so that she is unlikely to come into season again that year, then leave her until the end of the year. This will ensure she is fit and well for the operation, although you will have to keep her indoors afterwards for a couple of days at that time of year.