

**COSEWIC**  
**Rapid Review of Classification**

on the

**Black-footed Ferret**  
*Mustela nigripes*

in Canada

**EXTIRPATED**  
**2021**

**COSEWIC**  
Committee on the Status  
of Endangered Wildlife  
in Canada



**COSEPAC**  
Comité sur la situation  
des espèces en péril  
au Canada

The Rapid Review of Classification process is used by COSEWIC for Wildlife Species that have not changed status since the previous COSEWIC assessment. Readily available information from the previous status report or status appraisal summary, recovery documents, recovery teams, jurisdictions, conservation data centres, and species experts was initially reviewed by the relevant Species Specialist Subcommittees before being reviewed by COSEWIC. The following is a summary of the relevant information.

COSEWIC Rapid Review of Classification are working documents used in assigning the status of wildlife species suspected of being at risk in Canada. This document may be cited as follows:

COSEWIC. 2021. COSEWIC Rapid Review of Classification on the Black-footed Ferret *Mustela nigripes* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. vii pp. (<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry.html>).

Production note:

COSEWIC acknowledges Chris Johnson for writing the rapid review of classification on the Black-footed Ferret *Mustela nigripes*, in Canada, prepared under contract with Environment and Climate Change Canada. This rapid review of classification was overseen and edited by Chris Johnson, Co-chair of the COSEWIC Terrestrial Mammals Specialist Subcommittee.

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Également disponible en français sous le titre Examen rapide de la classification du COSEPAC sur le Putois d'Amérique (*Mustela nigripes*) au Canada.

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## COSEWIC Assessment Summary

### Assessment Summary – November 2021

**Common name**

Black-footed Ferret

**Scientific name**

*Mustela nigripes*

**Status**

Extirpated

**Reason for designation**

This is the only ferret species native to North America. Disease and the persecution of its primary prey, Black-tailed Prairie Dog, resulted in the extirpation of ferret from Canada. Captive-bred ferrets were released from 2009 to 2012 in Grasslands National Park, Saskatchewan. Prior to those efforts, this species was last observed in 1937. Insufficient prey resulted in suspension of the release program in 2013, and intensive monitoring has revealed no observations of ferret since then. Although the species is still held in captivity, it no longer occurs in the wild in Canada.

**Occurrence**

Alberta, Saskatchewan

**Status history**

Extirpated by 1974. Designated Extirpated in April 1978. Status re-examined and confirmed in May 2000, April 2009, and December 2021.



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**Rapid Review of Classification**

**PREFACE**

The historical distribution of the Black-footed Ferret in Canada largely coincided with its primary prey, Black-tailed Prairie Dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*). That included short- and mixed-grass habitats in southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan. Based on the Canadian distribution of Black-tailed Prairie Dog, southwestern Saskatchewan is the only area presently suitable for ferret. The majority (~96%) of prairie dog colonies are found in Grasslands National Park (Liccioli pers. comm. 2021).

There were no records of Black-footed Ferret in the wild in Canada from 1938 to 2008. From 2009 to 2012 the species was reintroduced to Grasslands National Park. Although the reintroduction resulted in at least one litter of wild born kits, a concurrent decline in the Black-tailed Prairie Dog led to the suspension of that program in 2013. The last contemporary record of Black-footed Ferret in the wild was 2013. Intensive monitoring of prairie dog colonies in Grasslands National Park provides strong evidence that Black-footed Ferret no longer exists in the wild in Canada (S. Liccioli, pers. comm. 2021). Black-footed Ferret is held in captivity in Canada and in the future may be released in the wild following the recovery of Black-tailed Prairie Dog (Parks Canada 2018).

Black-footed Ferret was first classified as extirpated in 1974. There has been no change in the status of this species following reassessment in 1978, 2000, and 2009. A Recovery Strategy was prepared in 2009 (Tuckwell and Everest 2009).

**Status History:**

Extirpated by 1974. Designated Extirpated in April 1978. Status re-examined and confirmed in May 2000, April 2009, and December 2021.

**Updated Map:**

Not required. See previous assessment (COSEWIC 2009).

## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

*Mustela nigripes*

Black-footed Ferret

Putois d'Amérique

Range of occurrence in Canada (province/territory/ocean): Alberta, Saskatchewan

### Status and Reasons for Designation

<b>Status:</b> Extirpated	<b>Alpha-numeric codes:</b> Not applicable
<b>Reasons for designation:</b> This is the only ferret species native to North America. Disease and the persecution of its primary prey, Black-tailed Prairie Dog, resulted in the extirpation of ferret from Canada. Captive-bred ferrets were released from 2009 to 2012 in Grasslands National Park, Saskatchewan. Prior to those efforts, this species was last observed in 1937. Insufficient prey resulted in suspension of the release program in 2013, and intensive monitoring has revealed no observations of ferret since then. Although the species is still held in captivity, it no longer occurs in the wild in Canada.	

### Applicability of Criteria

Criterion A (Decline in Total Number of Mature Individuals): Not applicable.
Criterion B (Small Distribution Range and Decline or Fluctuation): Not applicable.
Criterion C (Small and Declining Number of Mature Individuals): Not applicable.
Criterion D (Very Small or Restricted Population): Not applicable.
Criterion E (Quantitative Analysis): Not done.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer would like to thank Stefano Liccioli and Tara Stephens for their willingness to share unpublished data and their perspectives on the status and conservation of Black-footed Ferret and Black-tailed Prairie Dog. Liz Gillis assisted with the gathering and review of data.

### Authorities Contacted

Stefano Liccioli, Parks Canada  
Tara Stephens, Calgary Zoo

## INFORMATION SOURCES

Liccioli, S., pers. comm. 2021. *Email correspondence to C. Johnson*. February 2021. Wildlife Ecologist & Species at Risk Scientist, Grasslands National Park, Val Marie, SK.

Parks Canada. 2018. Report on the Implementation of the Recovery Strategy for the Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) in Canada (2009-2017). Parks Canada Agency. Ottawa.

Tuckwell, J., and T. Everest. 2009. Recovery Strategy for the Black-footed Ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) in Canada. Species at Risk Act Recovery Strategy Series. Parks Canada Agency. Ottawa.

## WRITER OF RAPID REVIEW OF CLASSIFICATION

Chris Johnson is a Professor at the University of Northern British Columbia and the Co-chair of the COSEWIC Terrestrial Mammals Species Specialist Subcommittee.



## COSEWIC HISTORY

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) was created in 1977 as a result of a recommendation at the Federal-Provincial Wildlife Conference held in 1976. It arose from the need for a single, official, scientifically sound, national listing of wildlife species at risk. In 1978, COSEWIC designated its first species and produced its first list of Canadian species at risk. Species designated at meetings of the full committee are added to the list. On June 5, 2003, the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) was proclaimed. SARA establishes COSEWIC as an advisory body ensuring that species will continue to be assessed under a rigorous and independent scientific process.

## COSEWIC MANDATE

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assesses the national status of wild species, subspecies, varieties, or other designatable units that are considered to be at risk in Canada. Designations are made on native species for the following taxonomic groups: mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, arthropods, molluscs, vascular plants, mosses, and lichens.

## COSEWIC MEMBERSHIP

COSEWIC comprises members from each provincial and territorial government wildlife agency, four federal entities (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada Agency, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and the Federal Biodiversity Information Partnership, chaired by the Canadian Museum of Nature), three non-government science members and the co-chairs of the species specialist subcommittees and the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge subcommittee. The Committee meets to consider status reports on candidate species.

## DEFINITIONS (2021)

Wildlife Species	A species, subspecies, variety, or geographically or genetically distinct population of animal, plant or other organism, other than a bacterium or virus, that is wild by nature and is either native to Canada or has extended its range into Canada without human intervention and has been present in Canada for at least 50 years.
Extinct (X)	A wildlife species that no longer exists.
Extirpated (XT)	A wildlife species no longer existing in the wild in Canada, but occurring elsewhere.
Endangered (E)	A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction.
Threatened (T)	A wildlife species likely to become endangered if limiting factors are not reversed.
Special Concern (SC)*	A wildlife species that may become a threatened or an endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.
Not at Risk (NAR)**	A wildlife species that has been evaluated and found to be not at risk of extinction given the current circumstances.
Data Deficient (DD)***	A category that applies when the available information is insufficient (a) to resolve a species' eligibility for assessment or (b) to permit an assessment of the species' risk of extinction.

\* Formerly described as "Vulnerable" from 1990 to 1999, or "Rare" prior to 1990.

\*\* Formerly described as "Not In Any Category", or "No Designation Required."

\*\*\* Formerly described as "Indeterminate" from 1994 to 1999 or "ISIBD" (insufficient scientific information on which to base a designation) prior to 1994. Definition of the (DD) category revised in 2006.



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Climate Change Canada  
Canadian Wildlife Service

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Canada

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