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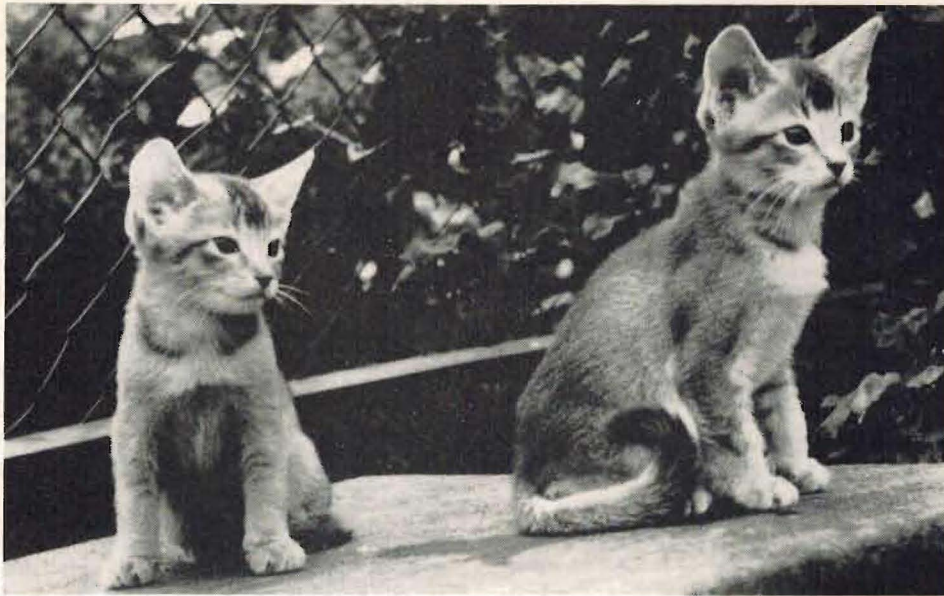
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Cats

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FAIRLIE BARENTU (Red Aby) and BLUE NILE (Blue Aby)

Owner/Breeder, Mrs. L. E. Stock.

The Blue Abyssinian Cat and Its Derivatives

by J. N. Stephens

IN the autumn of 1968 a Blue Abyssinian kitten FAIRLIE MEHESSO, bred by Mrs. Stock, appeared on the show bench at the West of England and South Wales Cat Society's show at Cirencester and he and his blue brother FAIRLIE MENELIC have been exhibited several times since. It is interesting to recall that the possibility of this new variety had already been foreseen in an article by Lady Welby, President of the Abyssinian Cat Club in Britain, on the Red Abyssinian Cat (F.A.B. Bulletin January 1967, Vol. VI No. 3) in which appears this sentence, "There are other possible variations in the Abyssinian such as white, blue and black—once all appearing in one litter—but these have not been exploited". It was only after Mrs. Evelyn bought MEHESSO as a stud that breeding of the Blue Abyssinian appears to have been attempted seriously in Britain. When he was mated to one of Mrs. Evelyn's Ruddy (this term is used throughout instead of "normal" or "usual") Queens in the Spring of 1969, a litter of 2 Blue females, 2 Blue males, and one Red male was born, showing that her Queen also carried the recessive blue gene.

However, the tale of the Blue Abyssinian really starts back in 1962 in California, and it is only with the kind co-operation of Mrs. Jewel C. Wolf of San Fernando Valley that I can tell this story. Mrs. Wolf was pres-

ented one day with a kitten of about 10 days old, found abandoned in a car, which she reared and subsequently used as a breeding Queen. This cat she named CINDY. After an examination by three Judges this Queen was registered as a Ruddy Abyssinian. Mated twice to one of Carolyn Alig's Ruddy Abyssinian studs, she produced all Ruddy Abyssinian kittens.

In 1964 she was mated to Mrs. Wolf's Ruddy stud CH. DU-RO-AL PALADIN OF ROYAL GEMS and in the first litter, born December 1964, there were 3 Ruddy kittens and 1 Blue male. The next two litters each contained 4 Ruddy kittens and 1 Blue male; but, in the fourth litter, born in June 1966, there were 4 Ruddy males and the Blue Female ROYAL GEMS BLUE CINCINNATI, who was kept for breeding.

The stud cat, Paladin, was also mated to another Ruddy female three times, producing all Ruddy kittens. Mrs. Wolf kept a female kitten from one of these litters which she subsequently mated back to her sire Paladin, producing in four litters, 4 Ruddies, 2 Reds, 1 Cream, 1 Orchid (Mrs. Wolf's description) and 2 unidentified stillborn kittens.

Excluding Cindy's first two litters, Mrs. Wolf has so far produced 74 kittens from 22 litters in her Blue breeding programme using 3 stud cats and 7 Queens. Out of 74 kittens, 46 were Ruddy, 13 Blue, 6 Red, 6 Cream, 1

Orchid and 2 unidentified. She finally achieved her first litter from a Blue x Blue mating on October 31st, 1969 which gave one Cream male, one Cream female, and one Blue female.

The Breeding History shows quite clearly that the Stud Paladin inherited the recessive gene responsible for producing the Red Abyssinian, as well as the recessive blue gene, and that he passed these colours on to many of his progeny. On the other hand the Queen Cindy only carried the blue gene.

The Blue cats show four layers of ticking, two of strong blue-grey, and two of different shades of cream, which is the dilute colouring to be expected when a Ruddy cat inherits the recessive blue gene from both parents; the pads are lilac.

The Cream cats show two layers of rich cream ticking similar in colour to the points of a Cream Point Siamese, and two paler shades of cream; the pads are black. The Orchid cat (which died at 3 months) showed two layers of lilac/blue ticking, one of medium cream and one a paler cream.

Mrs. Wolf now has 2 Blue Queens, 2 Blue Studs (one imported from Mrs. Evely), one Cream Stud and a potential Cream Queen. She also has two Ruddy cats (one Queen and one Stud) which are known to carry the blue gene. Seven of these cats are known also to carry the gene responsible for red and it is almost certain that the English import does as well.



FAIRLIE MEHESSO (Blue Aby male stud cat).
Breeder, Mrs. L. E. Stock; owner, Mrs. P. Evely.

One of the interesting aspects of this breeding programme is that it may help to throw fresh light on the gene responsible for the Red Abyssinian. There are two theories on this subject. The first one suggests that if a kitten inherits the brown gene (sometimes called chocolate) from both parents, a Red cat will result because the black ticking becomes a rich brown and the colour of the copper red ticking is enhanced to a strong red. If the blue gene is also inherited from both parents the red and rich brown are diluted to two shades of cream which is consistent with the known colour of the Cream Abyssinians. However, this theory seems to preclude the possibility of a separate Orchid (Lilac) variety because as has already been seen, the combination of brown and blue (the recipe for Lilac in Siamese) results in a Cream cat.

The second theory is that red in Abyssinians is caused by a so far unclassified autosomal (not sex-linked) red gene which must be carried by both parents. Inheritance of the recessive blue gene from sire and dam, as well as the autosomal red gene, will produce the Cream cat. If, however, a kitten was born to Ruddy parents which inherited the blue and brown genes from both of them, but not the red, this should produce the Orchid (Lilac) cat as the black ticking would be diluted to Lilac by the brown and blue, and the copper red to cream. This second theory could also explain the wide variety in coat colouring of both red and ruddy cats, as those inheriting the brown gene from both sides could be expected to have coats of a richer colour.

There has been criticism from breeders that the Blue Abyssinian can not be a pure Abyssinian cat. How it acquired the blue gene will probably remain as much a mystery as the origin of the Blue-pointed Siamese. Research into the pedigrees of the English cats and the American stud cat Paladin, who has four breed names in common with the English cats, has failed to reveal any evidence of non-Abyssinian blood. The American cat Cindy could be suspect, but already the latest American litter is four generations removed from her. It is a recognised principle of sound breeding practice that after a new hybrid has been produced, the characteristics of the animal used to effect any change will be bred out after five generations of back-crossing to the breed into which the new factor has been transplanted (see for example "Animal Breeding" by A. L. Hagerdorn revised edition 1962 p.227). Indeed had this practice not been recognised many of the cats and other animals seen at shows would not be there. Final proof of the purity of the Blue Abyssinians is the wonderful type they have already achieved. Mrs. Wolf considers that one of the young Blue Females, has the best type of any Abyssinian cat she has bred, including a Grand Champion Red Queen. The only time this kitten was shown competitively she was made Best Kitten in the experimental Division at the Silvergate Cat Club Show in San Diego and the only criterion the Judge could use was her closeness in type to the Abyssinian standard of points. Her other Blues have taken Best A.O.C. in a majority of the Shows they have been in.

With the present breeding stock, where the blue cats carry the gene responsible for red, a Blue x Blue mating will give an average of three Blues and one Cream kitten (over a number of litters), but only one of the Blues out of three will be homozygous (pure) for Blue. If only one parent carries the gene responsible for red, the chances of getting homozygous Blue kittens will be doubled. A good deal of work still has to be done both here and in American to produce a Blue Abyssinian pure in genotype, i.e. blue cats which will give only blue kittens when mated together. Much credit is due to Mrs. Wolf's unaided pioneer work over the past five years in developing these beautiful cats and progress should now accelerate with more breeders taking an interest and more stock available.