

Cats magazine

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Roxanastasia Legacy II

Breeder: Gary Hester

*Owners: Helene Schneider-Hester
& Pamela C. Anderson*

Uster

The Russian Blue

by Phil Maggitti

Facts and Figures

- Recognized in all associations.
- New CFA registrations for 1991: 439
- Change from previous year: -9%
- Rank in popularity for 1991:
 - 13 among 23 shorthaired breeds
 - 17 out of 35 breeds overall

Conformation

The Russian Blue is a fine-boned cat with a long, firm, muscular body that is lithe and graceful without being tubular in the manner of the Oriental breeds. The Russian's head is a smooth, medium wedge, neither long and tapering nor short and massive. The muzzle is blunt without an exaggerated whisker break. The top of the skull is long and flat in profile, descending gently to a point just above the eyes and continuing at a slight downward angle in a straight line to the tip of the medium-length nose. There is no stop or nose break, and the length of the nose should be shorter than the length of the line from the top of the skull to the eyes.

Wide-set, vivid-green eyes, at least one eye width apart, confer a broad look to the Russian Blue's face. The eyes, according to most registries, should be round; but the American Cat Fanciers Association prefers eyes that are "almost round, just oval enough to show an oriental slant."

Large ears—wide at the base, and more pointed than rounded crown the Russian Blue head. The ears are set far apart, as much on the side of the head as on the top.

The Russian Blue has a short, dense, fine double coat that stands out from the body. In a double coat the two outermost layers of hair—the guard hairs and the awn hairs—are the same length. Normally guard hairs are longer than awn hairs, which, in turn, are longer than down hairs. An even, bright blue throughout, the soft, silky coat has silver-tipped guard hairs that give the Russian Blue a silvery, lustrous appearance.

History

For several decades after the cat fancy had been started in Great Britain in 1871, all shorthaired blue cats competed in one class. Some members of that class were homebred domestic shorthairs. Others were foreign-born cats known by a variety of names: Archangel cats, Russian Blues, Spanish Blues, Chartreuse Blues and American Blues.

Harrison Weir, the father of the cat fancy, did not believe that blue cats constituted a distinct breed. They were "merely a light-coloured form of the black cat," wrote Weir in 1889. He was "bound to admit," however, that blue cats from Archangel "were of a deeper, purer tint than the English crossbreds."

Archangel cats were named after the city of Arkhangelsk, a port on the White Sea about 150 miles south of the Arctic Circle. Whether they actually originated in or about this city is not certain, but they most probably did originate in Russia; and they were, most probably, carried to Western Europe by sailors in the 1860s.

Near the turn of the century, Archangel cats—or Russian Blues as they were then more frequently known—were imported to the United States. Mrs. Clinton Locke of Chicago bought a cat named Lockhaven Royal Blue from a British fancier by the royal-blue name of Towlerton Flansholm. Another turn-of-the-century Chicago cat breeder, Mrs. Frederick Monroe, owned a Blue-and-White Russian Blue, which is something of a curiosity because modern-day Russians are bred and shown in Blue only.

We can assume that these first imports were not considered the cat's pajamas in the show ring. Dorothy Champion, writing in *Everybody's Cat Book* in 1909, observed, "Shorthaired Blues are usually kept for show purposes only in England, and are not nearly so plentiful as house pets as they are in this country, where they are called 'Maltese'."

In 1912 the Governing Council of the Cat Fancy in Great Britain established a separate class for foreign-born blue shorthairs. Until then Russian Blues had been overshadowed by the cobby, round-headed British cats in the blue shorthaired classes. With the institution of the Foreign Blue class, the fortunes of the Russian Blues improved; but they fell into decline, as many other breeds did, during World War II.

After the war breeders in England resuscitated the Russian Blue by crossing it with other cats whose color and type most closely resembled the Russian's. Some breeders chose the British Blue, thereby adding a plush, pale-colored coat to the Russian's. Other breeders used Bluepoint Siamese, which contributed a more svelte body type.

Scandinavian breeders, working independently of the British, created Russian Blues virtually from scratch. The Scandinavians crossed a blue cat from Finland with a Bluepoint Siamese. This produced a cat different from the born-again Russian Blues in England. The Scandinavian Russian Blues had larger heads, larger bodies, and shorter, tighter, darker coats than their British counterparts had.

Russian Blues were reintroduced to the United States in 1947 when Mr. C.A. Commaire of Texas imported two Russian Blues from England. Not long afterward, Dorothy Leck imported several Russian cats from Swedish lines. Eventually breeders in this country combined the splendid heads and emerald-green eyes of the Scandinavian lines with the pale, silver-blue coats and graceful body type of the British Russian Blues.

There were no "natural" Russian Blues available in those days, writes Richard H. Gebhardt, erstwhile president of the Cat Fanciers' Association, in *The Complete Cat Book*. "So breeders did what they had to do in order to expand the gene pool and to improve temperament." Indeed, says Gebhardt, "With the recessive pointed gene in the background, certain combinations of Russian Blues will produce what breeders call White Russians. They are not white at all. They are born white, as all Bluepoint Siamese are; but these kittens, of course, are nothing more than the consequences of the Bluepoint Siamese that have been used in their backgrounds." ■

For additional information see: *CATS*, November 1988