

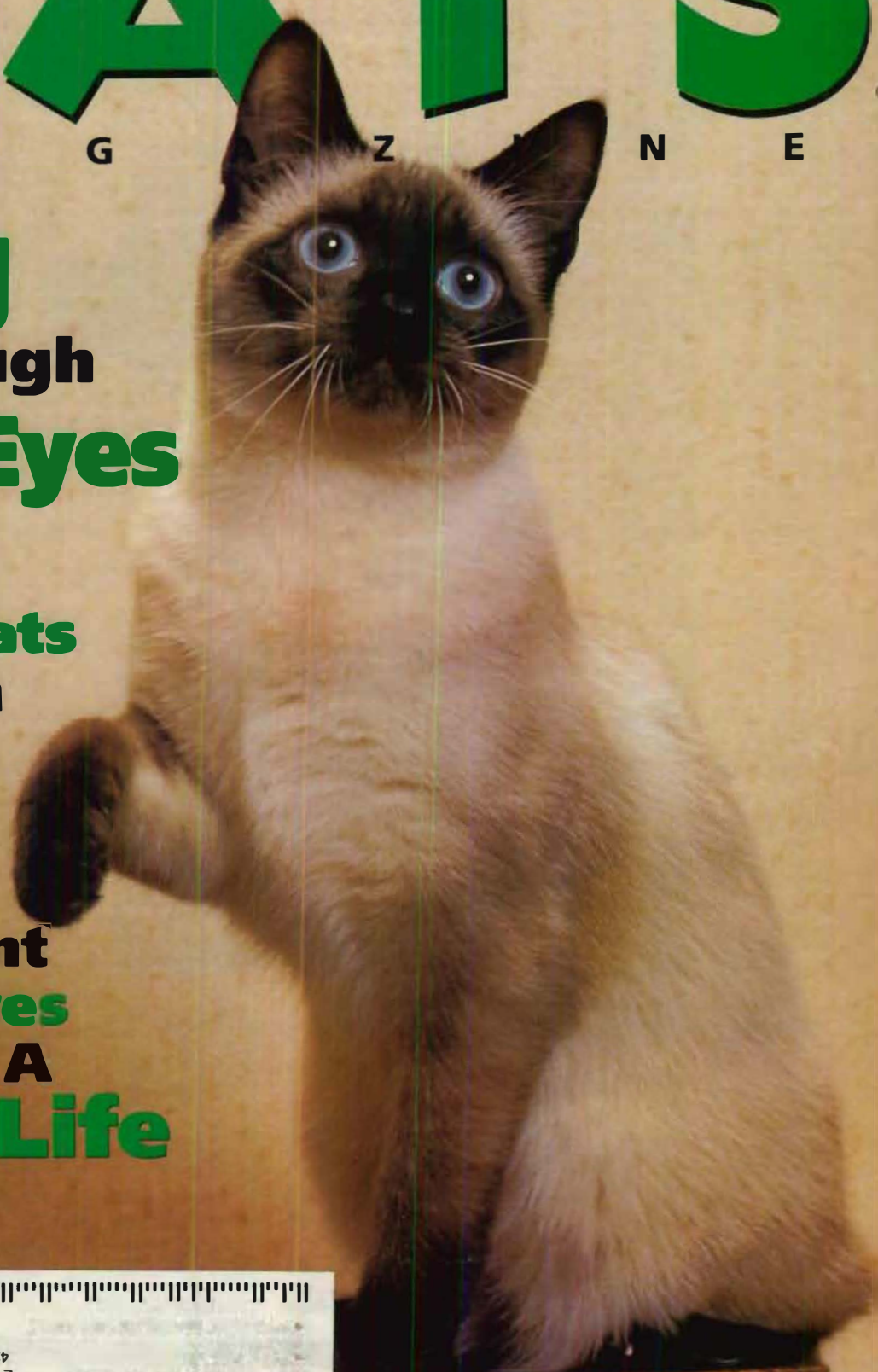
CATS

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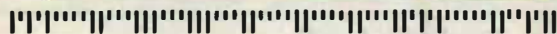
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Breed Of The Month by J. Anne Helgren



LAPATTS RAJHRAJRAJA & SYSBOOMBAH

RUSSIAN BLUE
BREEDERS/OWNERS: PATT AND LES KNUDTSON

THE RUSSIAN BLUE

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Championship status in all associations
- New CFA registrations for 1994: 494
- Change from last year:
8 percent decrease
- Rank in CFA popularity for 1994:
13th among 26 shorthaired breeds
19th out of 41 breeds overall

The Russian Blue has been around since at least the mid-1800s and likely much longer. Members of this elite blue breed have been called a variety of names: Archangel Blue, Spanish Blue, Maltese Blue and Foreign Blue.

They have also been called intelligent, devoted and incredibly enchanting. The Russian Blue is a gentle, considerate cat that displays a perpetual Mona Lisa smile for its favorite humans. Although currently quite rare, this feline has fanciers singing rhapsodies in blue.

Russian Origin

The most commonly held theory regarding this breed's origin is that Russian Blues were brought to Great Britain in 1860 by British sailors from the White Sea port town of Archangel (Arkhangelsk) in northern Russia. Their thick coats give credence to the hypothesis that they developed in a cold climate, and according to some accounts blue shorthairs still exist in Russia.

The Russian Blue is not known to be related to the other three shorthaired solid blue breeds: Thailand's Korat, France's Chartreux and Britain's British Shorthair (formerly called the British Blue). The four breeds have distinct differences in coat, type and personality, although the Korat, Chartreux and Russian Blue share a similar silver-blue sheen. Since all four of these breeds have long and mysterious ancestries, a common origin is certainly possible.

In 1871, a Russian Blue was shown at the first cat show at the Crystal Palace in London,

under the name "Archangel Cat." At this point, Russian Blues were shorthaired, solid-blue felines with foreign body types. From photos and published sources of the time (for example, *The Book of the Cat* by Frances Simpson, published in 1903), the original coat was thick, dense, glossy and a light silver-blue in color.

Russian Blues competed in one class with all other shorthaired blues, despite obvious differences in type. Since the round-headed, cobby British Blues were favored in the show halls, the svelte Russian Blues rarely won; interest in the breed waned. Finally, the GCCF acknowledged the breed and, in 1912, the Russian Blue was granted a class of its own. The breed then made progress until World War II when, along with many other breeds, it almost became extinct.

During the 1940s and 1950s, two independent groups of breeders worked to resurrect the Russian Blue by crossbreeding the few hardy survivors with other breeds. In Britain, breeders crossed the Russian Blue with Bluepoint Siamese and British Blues. Because of the Siamese influence, the moderate foreign body style of the Russian Blues bred in Great Britain became more extreme. In 1952 the GCCF breed standard was rewritten accordingly, calling for an "elongated, elegant body, graceful lines, delicate bones and light type." The thick double coat seemed to have been eliminated.

At the same time, Scandinavian breeders attempted to "recreate" the breed by crossing blue cats from Finland with Siamese cats to enhance the solid-blue coloration. These cats were larger than British-bred Russian Blues with larger heads and shorter, denser coats. The overall type was not consistent, however, because the separate groups of breeders used different bloodlines.

In 1965, a group of British breeders, not pleased with all the changes, began efforts to restore the Russian Blue to its original condition. In 1966, the show standard was again changed, now stating that the Siamese type was undesirable. By breeding the Scandinavian variety with the Russian Blue bred in Great

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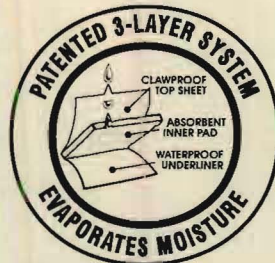
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Breed Of The Month

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Britain, breeders finally achieved consistency by combining the former's good head type and vivid, green eye color with the latter's silver-blue coat color and graceful body style.

The Russian Blue arrived in America in the early 1900s, but it was not until 1947 that serious attempts at breeding and promoting it began in the United States. Unfortunately, due to the inconsistency of the breeding stock, and the three other blue breeds claiming fanciers' esteem, the Russian Blue didn't get as much attention as it might otherwise have received. It wasn't until 1964 that the first Russian Blue achieved CFA Grand Champion status.

However, imports from Britain gradually improved the bloodlines, and the Russian Blue gained much needed stability. Hard work by dedicated breeders has improved the Russian Blue bloodline to the point that Russian Blues bred in America have even been exported to Europe to improve their bloodlines.

True Blue

Since Arkhangelsk is only 150 miles south of the Arctic Circle, it's not surprising that Russian Blues arrived in Britain wearing thick, plush coats. The breed's most distinctive feature, its beautiful double coat, has been restored to its full glory. The coat is silky, plush and so dense it stands out from the body. You can literally use your fingers to draw pictures in the fur; the patterns will remain until you smooth them over, or until your feline friend tires of the game and walks away. Even though the dense double coat is short, it does require grooming to look its best.

The Russian Blue comes in only one color — solid blue, which in the cat color palette is actually gray. The silver-tipped guard hairs reflect light, giving the coat a silver sheen. This combination of silvery coat and vivid, green eyes create a strikingly beautiful feline.

Body style is foreign — fine boned,

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Breed Of The Month

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long, lithe and slender. While appearing slim, the Russian Blue is muscular and strong and can leap to the top of the tallest bookcase with ease.

The head type is a smooth, medium wedge but has a broad appearance because of the wide-set eyes and thick facial fur. The ears are also set far apart and are large and wide at the base. There's no nose break or stop. The slightly upturned corners of the mouth make most Russian Blues appear to have a constant smile.

Polite Company

Russian Blues are good for folks who want their cats by their side rather than in their face. They are gentle, genteel cats and are usually reserved — or absent — when strangers are around. When they're with their own beloved humans, however, they are affectionate, playful and devoted. Russian Blues are active but not annoyingly so. They like nothing better than to spend time retrieving a favorite toy or chasing sunbeams. Although they willingly entertain themselves, they prefer their favorite humans to join in the fun. When you're home they follow you around, unobtrusive but ever-present companions.

Russian Blues like to have a stable routine and dislike environmental changes more than the average cat. They particularly detest variations in their feeding schedule. Fastidious about their litter boxes, they will complain if their 'facilities' are not spick-and-span.

Polite, quiet and well-behaved, Russian Blues would make Miss Manners proud. It's easy to train them to stay off counters and out of restricted areas with a simple "no." But Russian Blues seem to think politeness should go both ways and take offense at being made to look silly. You can trust them to know when you're laughing at them — and they won't soon forget it, either.

Russian Blues greet you with a smile, entertain and adore you, and afterwards are content to sleep quietly by your side. What more could a cat lover want? **C**

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