





THE SONG TELLS us that "the Southland gave birth to the blues" and, where music is concerned, it is undeniable that we can trace the origins of the blues through the many developments which came about over the years directly to the South, whether from the work songs and folk laments on the plantations or the instrumental improvisations from New Orleans and Memphis. Would that it were thus easy to trace the origins of the color blue in cats. The plain truth is that, although we have a reasonably good understanding of it genetically, we do not know where the very first blue cat appeared or what its breed.

Blue, all are agreed, is a simple dilution of black and, since brown is genetically black, of brown as well. Thus we find blue in all the breeds where black or brown appears: Persian, Himalayan, Birman, Balinese, American Shorthair, Exotic Shorthair, Manx, Rex, Siamese and—although this will raise eyebrows and cause a flood of mail—Burmese, not to mention the breeds which appear only in blue such as the Russian Blue, the Korat, the Chartreux. Even the Havana Brown which has blue in the breeds which contribute to its makeup should be carrying blue genes. Whatever the breed, being a simple recessive, blue to blue will breed true.

But where did the first blue cat appear? Did all our present blues, of whatever breed, spring from one common ancestor, or did this dilution gene appear spontaneously in many places? With all the study that has been lavished on such matters we still do not have any answer to this date which may be considered completely authoritative.

For instance, there are those who believe that the Bluepoint Siamese is actually a hybrid cat which resulted solely from outcrossing to a self-blue cat and many believe this blue to have been what we now call an American Shorthair. Undoubtedly such crosses did occur and there is no reason to dispute the premise that Bluepoints can be developed in this way and probably have been from time to time. But what of the further premise that this is the only way they can appear? There is reason to question this. Specific altera-

SO LONG, FOR A WHILE—

## SINGIN' THE BLUES

by Jane S. Martinke

tions in genes are not necessarily confined to one instance and the same alteration can occur spontaneously in widely scattered areas. We might consider the Rex gene as an example. It has appeared spontaneously in such varied localities that it is improbable in the extreme that there can be any familial relationship between the cats who have produced offspring with curly coats. Moreover, such curly-coated cats did not appear for the first time since the Second World War as so many seem to believe simply because only then was systematic work begun on them. Back in the twenties and thirties they were not too uncommon among our domestic cat population here in the United States and they were then referred to as Karakul Cats. No effort was made at that time to isolate and preserve this gene in order to create a new type of cat which would breed true, something that could have been done as easily then with those genes as now if anyone had been sufficiently interested. Only the occasional old-timer recalls their appearance when they were considered merely an interesting novelty and not a whole new addition to our show cat roster.

When we lack cold hard facts on any subject and have no evidence to back up our opinions we have only one recourse. We must fall back on plain old common horsesense, so let us utilize a little of this commodity and see where it brings us with blue cats.

The gene for blue is commonly referred to as the "Maltese Dilution Factor" and in books published many, many years ago there is reference to cats from Malta, some of which were red and some blue. Today country people, finding a blue among their barn denizens, will refer to it as a Maltese even with no knowledge whatever of cat genetics or the terminology thereof. It may well be that the first blue cats to attract the notice of common everyday people were in Malta or imported to other countries

from there, or it may be that these cats were the first to come under reasonably, if somewhat primitive, scientific scrutiny and the name which attached itself to this genetic dilution simply trickled down to ordinary cat lovers.

Among the cats from Asia Minor we are told that some were "gray." Since it is highly unlikely that these were silvers it is not unreasonable to assume that they were a form of blue and this may be our first recorded instance of the color among longhairs. We must keep in mind that they were still so uncommon in England as to be categorized as AOV in the shows until 1889 when a class was opened up for them which was then divided between males and females in 1890. Only after that time did they gain their great popularity.

The Russian Blues, which were originally called Archangel Cats because they were brought into England by sailors travelling between the port of Archangel and the northern reaches of Great Britain, were, we are told, a richer, clearer blue than the domestic cats of England. Here is another widely removed location in our geography lesson.

There is a story to the effect that the Chartreux cats were originally brought to the mother house of the Chartreusian order of monks from their missions in South Africa. These cats were so completely different from either the British Blues or the Russian Blues that they could not possibly have been confused with either of these breeds originally, although they have since been so interbred with the British Blues that they have lost the distinctive characteristics which once set them apart—or the British Blues took on enough of the physical traits of the Chartreux to bring them to something more nearly approximating each other in appearance—and they have now been virtually absorbed into the British Blue breed.

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Since October 1968 when Mrs. Martinke's first article on the Exotic Shorthair (*The Mod Persian in the Mini-Skirt*) appeared, there has not been a month when she has not been advising, informing, comforting or stirring up you readers. Her work has been of immense benefit to all the cat fancy and is an addition to the cat literature of immeasurable value. None of us can begrudge her a break after these fifty-three solid months, but she has promised not to forget us, and we can all look forward to her guidance from time to time in the future as she finds subjects which require her attention. Thank you, Jane, for all your contributions—from your readers, and from us at CATS. —R.D.S.



Let us pursue our geography a little further and we find that the cat which the people of Thailand consider to be their true native domestic cat is not what we call the Siamese cat at all, but rather a solid blue cat which we know as the Korat.

It is generally agreed by naturalists that not all domestic cats sprang from the same rootstock among the feral cats. When one considers the widely scattered areas of the world in which blue cats are found, with differences of type dictated either by geography, climate or the wild ancestry from which they developed, the natural barriers which tend to limit species to certain circumscribed areas, and the lack of human interference in the process of natural selection until the comparatively recent past, it would be difficult indeed to swallow whole without an oversized grain of salt the theory that all of these cats from the West, the Orient, the far north of the Northern Hemisphere and the deep south of the Southern Hemisphere go back to one common ancestor who chanced to have a color gene which mutated to a dilute form.

Therefore the application of a little of the aforementioned horsesense brings us to the conclusion that, while almost certainly there could have been cross-mating between the Sealpoint Siamese and a self-blue of another breed which resulted in the Bluepoint Siamese eventually, there could quite as easily have been cases in which the dilution factor occurred spontaneously as well and where no hybridism need have been involved. It is quite likely that our present Bluepoints have descended from both these types of breeding.

We might even indulge in a little flight into the realm of pure speculation and come up with some interesting thoughts for passing an idle hour or two, starting with some facts. Blue is the dilute of black and also seal. Siamese are semi-albinos, the geneticists tell us. An albino of anything springs originally from something which is fully colored, whatever that color may have been. If we accept that Sealpoint was the first and original color of Siamese, as many believe, then it is reasonable to assume that it sprang from a solid brown cat. We know of only one solid brown cat, the one we know as Burmese. Restriction of color to the points is a recessive characteristic and we know that the original Burmese in this country, old Wong Mau, carried the recessive gene for colorpointing. Are, then, the Burmese and the Siamese basically the same cat?

This premise is hard to accept when we visualize these two cats as we know them today after many generations

of man's interference with the natural breeding processes which would have taken place in their normal environment, and his substitution of his own selective breeding programs designed to "set" certain characteristics. But let us think instead of the type of the Siamese as we originally knew it in the early days, within the memory of many of us now living and not yet quite ready to cash in their chips and pass to their reward from old age. They were a far cry from today's Siamese and virtually identical with the original Burmese for, just as the Siamese of those days was much stockier and with a more rounded head than now, the Burmese was then what was known as Foreign Shorthair type and had not yet acquired its present breadth and cobbliness.

So let us carry this a step further. The Burmese, being a brown, could quite conceivably have acquired a dilute gene for blue spontaneously and produced the cat known now as Korat. Then, after some of these blue cats also carried the recessive gene for restrictive colorpointing, Bluepoint Siamese could also have come about in a perfectly natural and normal way without the necessity for hybridizing. This would mean that the Burmese, the Korat and the Siamese are all of the same breed originally, differing now only because of man's imposition on them of his selective breeding practices, and this would mean that the Burmese, now so hard to locate in its original habitat, was the forerunner of the other two breeds.

Ah well, we do not know. Probably we shall never know with certainty exactly the whats, the whens and the whys in the dim past when no one was bothering to observe and record the changes appearing in the feline population of the world. After all, far too little was ever recorded about the human race and even there we must gain much of our knowledge from some rather free-wheeling detective work based on fragments of this and that as one puts together a jigsaw puzzle with half the pieces missing and tries to visualize the complete picture as it really was. The guesses may be right or they may be comically far afield from the truth but we are constrained to keep on speculating, hunting, deducing, because we are born with a thirst for knowledge and, when fact is not available, we must do with fancy based on what jots and tittles of fact we may be able to unearth, using our ratiocinative processes to fill in the gaps as best we may. Cats, having no natural sense of history and continuity, have not themselves left much for us to work on and man in the dark ages did his best to wipe them and all traces of them off the face of the earth.

Be all that as it may, in reading rather widely about the old Blues, I am struck by one fact. The *only* type of Blue in which the problem of tabby markings is not mentioned in the old literature is the Archangel Cat or Russian Blue which from the first seems to have been notably free of striping. This is the more remarkable when one remembers that the only other type of domestic cat considered to be indigenous to the Russias was a longhaired cat which was always tabby with the exception of a very few blacks which were almost certainly analogous to the black panther, a plain case of extreme melanism. In the intervening century or so stringent efforts have been made to eradicate all traces of striping or shading from the Blues of all breeds. This may even account for the fact that recognition was withheld for so long from the Blue Tabbies, one of the earliest colors known. Incidentally, apropos of the difference of opinion as to whether the ground color of the Blue Tabbies should be a pale blue, as some insist, or the "blued old ivory" of the standard, I might call attention here to a statement found in *Genetics for Cat Breeders* by Roy Robinson. "In these animals (i.e., the blue tabbies) the stripes are a slatey blue and the agouti areas are cream or fawny."

While in either longhair or shorthair Blues soundness of coloring has almost from the beginning taken precedence over the shade of blue, again almost from the beginning a preference has been shown for the paler shades often spoken of as "lavender." Most people consider this pastel coloration more aesthetically pleasing, but it has still another advantage. Any latent tabby markings—and make no mistake, they are there, latent in every color and every breed to a greater or lesser degree—become less noticeable in the paler shades so that it appears easier to breed for soundness of color with them. One problem is encountered here, though, in the Persians and, of course then, in the Exotic Shorthairs as well. In these breeds we want the deepest, most brilliant copper eyes possible to obtain. Unfortunately depth of color in eyes and coat seems to be genetically linked and so the more success we achieve in breeding for the very pale pastel shade of blue coat, the more likely we are to find the depth of tone in the eye color diminishing in direct proportion as well. The real trick is to find a way to combine deep rich eye color with pale misty coat color and, until that can be achieved (and one does occasionally see it—very occasionally) to strike some sort of happy medium in which the color of both coat and eyes will be acceptable if not com-

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## MARTINKE

Starts  
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pletely ideal. Through the years the pendulum has swung first one way, then the other. Today one rarely sees the extremely pale Blues that once used to be considered mandatory and which were commonly found, for much of that color was lost when it became necessary to lay more stress on eye color if we were not to end up with Blues with lemon-colored eyes.

In the American Shorthair we do not have the problem with the eye color because gold is the requirement and the norm rather than copper, but it is much more difficult to achieve a truly pastel tone of blue in the coat of a shorthaired cat. The outer part of the coat always tends to be darker than that next to the skin and the outer part of the coat is closer to the skin in a shorthair cat, creating an effect of a darker coat in general than that of a longhair of similar coloration in which the tipping is diffused as the fur lengthens and spreads out. Indeed I would eye an American Shorthair somewhat askance if it did possess a truly pastel blue coat and would wonder how many generations back the Persian had been introduced into its heritage via the wrong side of the blanket.

The Bluepoint Siamese and the Balinese and Himalayans have somewhat of a problem to overcome. Nature's own dilution of brown tends to be a soft blue with a hint of taupe in it, whereas the blue which is the dilute of true black will be much colder in tone. Instead of recognizing this fact of nature and making of it an advantage by requiring this natural shade of blue—and it is a lovely color—the standards were unnaturally slanted toward the cold blue. One so seldom sees it in the colorpointed breeds, a fact which is deplored constantly in print, but why should there be such surprise about it. It is an unnatural color for these cats and while, if the cold tone is what the Siamese breeders prefer and consider to be more beautiful and more desirable, it may be worthwhile to pursue it, they must be prepared to have to work harder to achieve it than would be necessary if they were merely refining and perfecting Mother Nature's own dictum as to the proper shade for the dilute of seal.

The Rex has its own difficulties in achieving sound blue as it has in reaching the perfection of other breeds in any color, for it does not have the natural advantage of guard hairs. Rexes have, perhaps, slightly less difficulty with blue than with some of the other colors, but the natural unsoundness of the blue undercoat which in them cannot be concealed by an outer



coat will be evident to some extent. It is probably unrealistic to be as severe in judging the color of this breed as one would be with the Persian or the American Shorthair.

The Russian Blue is still another matter. Traditionally this breed has been supposed to have a plushy type of coat, very short and very thick. This, in a good specimen, resembles the nap of a carpet or costume velvet which, when the fingers are rubbed against the nap, shows dark where it has been disturbed. Now recently it has been found that at least part of this effect is actually due to the fact that each individual hair is tipped with sparkling silver and it is when these silver tips of the very thick coat are pushed aside and separated that the effect of darkness is noticed. Russian Blue breeders now are campaigning to have the Russian Blues removed from consideration as solid colored cats where they have traditionally been placed, feeling that they are actually two colors, blue and silver, in shaded pattern. For this reason, too, they question the provision of the standard which states that the lighter or lavender shades of blue are preferred, for they feel that a very light blue does not offer sufficient contrast with the silver tipping to allow the sparkling effect to shine forth in all its glory. Originally the Russian Blues had a coat far more plushy than it is today and it was so dense it stood straight off from the body even though it was quite short in length. Since this would have crowded the silver tipping together so closely as to create a solid effect, perhaps this is what those who originally formulated the standard saw, considering the change of color when brushed back to be an effect like nap or a trick of light, not realizing that there was an actual difference in color at the tips. The more tipping there is the more beautiful the cat and the paler it will look, and so they wrote the standard to show that the lighter effect was considered more desirable. This seems far more likely than that the silver tipping now seen so widely and in such strong quality is a recent development of the breed.

The Korat too is supposed to have a heavy silver sheen, but where the Russian Blue standard specifies that the guard hairs are to be "silver-tipped giving the cat a silvery sheen of lustrous appearance," the Korat standard calls instead for "silver-blue over all, tipped with silver, the more silver tipping the better. Where the coat is short the sheen of silver is intensified." If one is to accept that the Russian Blue is not a solid color cat, then one must necessarily put the Korat in the same category.

Consider the similarity in the description of the color of these two cats, each of which is recognized only in the one color. There is, and has always been, only one honest color in the Russian Blues from the time of their first importation from Archangel to England—namely, blue. There is some evidence that the Korats do actually occur in other colors such as lavender even though no color other than silver-blue has official sanction for the show ring. The origin of either breed is shrouded in utter darkness. They are blue and therefore a dilute color. There must, surely, somewhere at sometime in each case, have been a black or a brown cat in the background. We have speculated above about a possible relationship between the Burmese and the Korat which would explain it, but nowhere do we have any hint whatever of a black or a brown which might have given rise to the Archangel cat. This is a mystery which may never be solved and an unsolved puzzle is a fertile field for the rise of legends. In any case, each of these breeds has added silver tipping to its basic blue. Does this render invalid all our predications of separate origins of the various blues due to wide geographical separation and natural barriers? Not necessarily, for, although the odds against mutation to both silver-tipping and blue appearing in separate locations are greater by far than against the blue gene by itself, this is not impossible.

On the other hand we cannot forget that widely separated civilizations such as the Egyptians and the Incas arrived at the same systems of mathematics, astronomy, surgery etc. apparently independently since contact between these races would seem unlikely, yet we cannot rule out entirely the possibility that there was communication of some sort between them and, in this case, cats from diverse regions might have been scattered hither and yon. However, we must also remember that although some of the scientific lore of the ancient Egyptians was duplicated or copied by the Incas, Egypt was also one of the earliest strongholds of the cat, the first to recognize the need for it, and if their other specialties had been passed on to others in the far corners of the world, the useful cat might well have been one of the contributions. Yet it was not until the European arrived in the New World that the domestic cat arrived in the Western Hemisphere. There is endless room here for speculation then, but it is fruitless when there is no hope of corroborating or refuting the conclusions arrived at.

This is the last in this very long series of articles. Thank you for reading them.

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