

Riverlight Cattery

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Love is a Russian Kitten by Mavis L. Jones. (c.1969)

A few years ago I wrote an article on Russian Blues. At that time we had studied and bred specifically Russian Blues. Today, after many years of research and dedication, and a great deal of experience in breeding, I intend writing on the Russian Group of cats.

Contrary to popular belief, the Russian Blue is not indigenous to Russia alone. The title "Russian Blue" is somewhat misleading too. The Russian Blue is not confined to Russia, because it is found in most countries in the northern half of the continent. They are also native to the Isle of Archangel, and indeed are frequently referred to as Archangel cats.

Nor is it reasonable to assume that there are only blue cats in Russia! Blacks, blues, blue-tabbies and white cats are all native to Russia. The ancestral coat pattern of all cats is tabby! Black cats are really tabby cats without the tabby inducing gene, and blue is a dilution of black. Therefore the Blue Russian had to be preceded by the black which originated from the tabby! Early in 1900, a prominent English breeder of that decade, Mrs. Carew-Cox, imported two Russian cats from Norway. They were blue tabbies and were forerunners of many of today's Russian Blues. One positive sign of a true Russian Blue or Archangel cat is the ghost tabby markings at birth, which gradually, but entirely disappear in maturity. In maturity tabby markings are considered faults.

White-coated cats are a different proposition. White is really not a colour! The white cat has a total lack of colour inducing genes, so that the white coat is really a masking for whatever colour lies beneath the white. In the case of the Russian cats, it is a disguise or cover up for black, blue or tabby!

When a white kitten is born, it usually carries a smudge of colour between its ears, which indicates the true colour hidden under the white coat. (MY NOTE: If it doesn't, then the kitten is likely homozygous for white.) The smudge also signifies good hearing. This little patch of colour disappears completely by the time the kitten becomes an adult.

It is very difficult to establish a "pure" white strain. One cannot guarantee all white kittens from two white parents, as one parent only needs to be a carrier for colour to produce a percentage of coloured kittens.

The only way to tell whether a white cat is "pure" is to look at all its progeny. In order to establish a true breeding white strain, two "pure" white cats must be mated, and to produce two such "pure" white, would take years of breeding and progeny testing.

We did not set out to establish a "pure" white line. We mated white female to blue male, always, thereby eliminating the problem of deafness, or worse still, the incidence of lethal genes, which can eventuate from white and white matings.

When we embarked on our campaign to evolve the first White Russians outside their native environment, we were faced with many difficulties. Firstly, Australian breeders were conditioned to believe there were only blue cats in Russia. We had to educate the sceptics to accept the fact that Russian cats coats came in many colours, as do most cats all over the world! Secondly, our R.A.S (MY NOTE: Royal Agricultural Society) strictly forbade any experimentation with the Russian Blue, and rightly so. The Russian is one of the very few rare breeds today which remains true to its native type, unspoiled by man's interference.

Russian Blue breeders condemned our idea. They said we would never succeed! But we were adamant and determined to overcome their objections. We had read of the White Russian cats domiciled in the great Siberian snowfields, and had photos of them and visualised one of our own! A beautiful Russian cat with the brilliant green eyes, prominent whisker pads, long elegant body and legs, and the soft, lustrous, plush uniquely "different" double coat, which instead of the rich blue of the Russian Blue, was shimmering glistening white!

Actually, we did not experiment with the Russian breed. We sought to introduce the already existent white-coated Russian to Australia, and to increase their numbers, so that these beautiful animals would become a fully recognised breed, with their own breed number.

We did not proceed haphazardly. We sought the advice of two prominent animal geneticists at Sydney University, and followed their instructions implicitly. Unlike the so-called "White Burmese" of a few years ago which was given so much publicity, the White Russian was evolved through a carefully calculated, thoroughly researched programme.

Our project began in earnest when we acquired a genuine white Siberian cat, albeit a "domestic", as she possessed no pedigree. She was the family pet of an official at the Thai Embassy, who brought her to Australia with him. We exchanged a Russian Blue for this beautiful white cat, and mated her to one of our Russian Blue studs. She produced two white kittens in her litter, the best of which we kept, and named White Rose, then applied for permission to breed White Russians. To our knowledge, the white cat from

Russia or Siberia, is the only cat suitable to cross with a Russian Blue. White Rose grew to be a beautiful white queen, long, svelte, elegant, with all the appearances, and the charming characteristics of the Russian Blues.

Eventually we mated Rose back to her sire, Myemgay Yuri, who had already established quite a reputation for himself, as best shorthair stud cat for two successive years. Our two first generation White Russian kittens were registered in November 1971. They were exquisite and we were delighted.

Sadly Rose developed milk fever when her babies were three weeks old, and we lost her. We raised the two wee girls with a dolls bottle and carnation milk, until they were old enough to digest solid food.

It would take far too long to enumerate all the difficulties and incidents that "happen" in a programme such as ours. Suffice to say they were many and varied, but we accepted them as they came, and managed to overcome most. Of course there were some heartaches, but we accepted those too.

We mated our two first generation whites to two different Myemgay Blue Studs to produce our second generation whites and then two of the best whites (one from each litter) to produce our third generation kitten. We continued this procedure until we reached fourth generation and applied for full registration and recognition of our whites. They were granted full registration, eligible to compete for Championship status in July 1975.

It all seems remarkably easy on reading these notes, but in retrospect there were many anxious moments in many different ways. Our goal often appeared an impossibility.

At Sydney's Federal Show in June 1976, we exhibited five adult whites and another young litter of whites. At Sydney's Royal Show the following year, a judge remarked that our whites were whiter than white, in fact they were "Persil White" (MY NOTE: For those of you that don't know, Persil is a laundry detergent -- kind of like saying "Tide White")! Our whites had made it!

Standard for Russian Whites is identical for Russian Blues, the only exception being for coat colour, which must be pure sparkling white with no hint of any discolouration.

Commencing our programme, we kept seven Russian Blue studs, using blue male to white female always, and keeping to a programme incorporating line-breeding without outcrossing, in an endeavour to instil the finest qualities and characteristics of the Russian Blues in to the Russian Whites. We have progressed to 5th and 6th generation kittens and each succeeding generation has shown improvement on the preceding one. Our whites now have beautiful soft silky plush coats with an abundance of fine downy undercoat that is unique to the Russian cat. Eyes are almond shaped and brilliant green with a depth of expression, whisker pads are prominent and the Russian can "puff" his pads like no other cat. Ears are very upright and large, giving the Russian a very alert expression.

To date we have test mated all four colours, the tabbies, the blacks, the blues and the whites. All have bred true to colour. All colours mated to blues, produce around 50% blues and 50% the colour of the female. All blues, from whites or other colours, mated to blues, produce only blue kittens, proving all our Russians are genetically pure. White kittens are progeny of White Dam x Blue Sire only.

By nature all Russians are quiet, softly spoken and gentle natured, without being subdued. They are fun loving and full of mischief but not destructive. They adapt quickly to discipline, never display temper tantrums, are scrupulously clean and spend hours grooming themselves. They have wonderfully affectionate natures and make superb pets for old and young alike. Being so clean and such quiet little cats, they are ideal pets for folk who reside in units or apartments.

Female Russians are inclined to be rather silent in season so need to be watched carefully. Their "antics" usually signify the fact that your Russian Queen has a romantic urge. She doesn't have the sharp voice of other cats, but makes a soft "brrp-brrp" like a bird chirping. She does not "call" as frequently as other breeds either, sometimes there may be six to nine months between seasons! It may be wise to wait until your Russian Queen is fifteen months or older before breeding her.

Russian males are very gentle studs, not nearly as aggressive as most other males. They treat their Queens with respect and really enjoy a "family" situation where they can be trusted to live with the queen after mating and even during kitting. They love to help the queen raise their babies. Like other breeds though, they are jealous of other males, and will fight any strange Tom who dares invade his territory.

Russian kittens are a delight from birth. They are do soft and woolly and cuddly. They are hardy little babies and easy to raise. Their mothers are very possessive and attentive and the kittens should be allowed to run with their mother until at least three months of age.

A mixed litter of blue and white kittens is a joy to behold, a pleasure to be long remembered. It would seem I am obsessed by the beauty and elegance and wonderful nature of the Russian Cat. I admit I am! Truly "LOVE IS A RUSSIAN KITTEN!"