

THE BURMESE CAT

Doris Springer*



Mrs. Springer with Pogo and Louella cats. I became so enamored of the Burmese that no other breed has held any challenge, any real interest to me since. To own one, to know

The history of the Burmese cat in America has been fraught with problems; problems of breed survival, or individual survival, of insufficient outcross; problems of origin; problems of standard; problems of semantics in regards description; and problems of breeders so separated in time and distance as to make close cooperation in breeding programs all but impossible.

My experience with the breed began in the mid '30's when I came to San Francisco from southern California solely to meet Dr. Thompson and Billie Gerst and to see the solid brown cats. I became so enamored of the Burmese that no other breed has held any challenge, any real interest to me since. To own one, to know one, is to love them all.



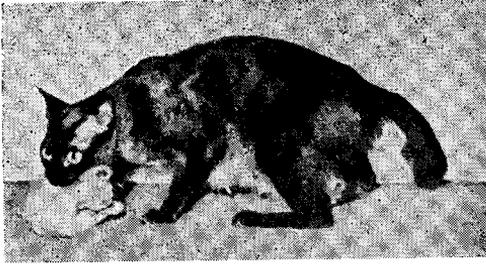
Mrs. Billie Gerst
Palo Alto, Calif.

When Dr. Thompson made his start here in 1930 with the female Wong Mau, can you imagine the problems confronting him and his very able assistant, Mrs. Billie Gerst? Limited to one cat, with only Siamese available for breeding purposes?

Mrs. Gerst was very well versed in genetics, holding a Master's Degree in Animal Husbandry. To her must go full credit for the survival of the breed in this country. Without her gruelling efforts we would have no Burmese today. It was she, with her deep and abiding love for the "Sable Shadows" who did the ground work for future

generations of eager Burmese breeders.

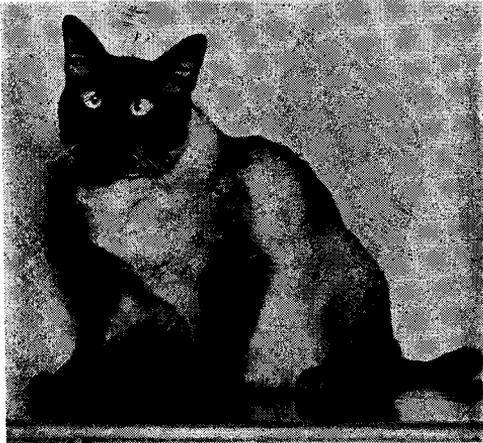
*Mrs. Springer is a long time breeder of Burmese, was the First President of the United Burmese Cat Fanciers, and is a CFA Judge. Data on her will be found in the Judges Section. *Year Book, 1964*



Wong-Mau 1930

Mildred Alexander of Los Angeles, with her famous "Motel for Cats" early started a strain of her own from two of the early cats. Many winning Burmese of today carry in their background names of the early "Alexander" Burmese. Brought up and educated abroad, Mildred added a keen mind and a delightful personality to the cat fancy of her day, as well as being a rare beauty.

Now as to the breeding program, from the first hybrid mating the breeders chose the Sable colored kittens for back-breeding to the parent cat, as well as making sibling matings in order to preserve the type and color. These inbreedings produced animals markedly smaller than the parent stock, causing much concern to both Dr. Thompson and Billie Gerst. In order to offset this size drop and lack of stamina, they further outcrossed with Siamese, breeding back again to the grand-parent animal, and to other related cats.



Pak Kwai Mu 1938-1940

both Dr. Thompson and his cat, midst cries of "hybrid" and "cull" they insisted that exhibition of this creature would bring ruin upon their Siamese. Mrs. Alice Clark, then President of the club, and STILL President of the club, tried to make peace among them, but to no avail, so the withdrawal of both Dr. Thompson and his cat resulted.

Among other early breeders who assisted in the program were Ruth Fisher, graduate of California's well known Mills College. Ruth advised, assisted, and kept a number of the animals. She remained a Burmese breeder until her death two years ago.

In spite of their efforts, by 1938 the Burmese color was largely lost. The Pacific Cat Club, San Francisco called a show for January 13th & 14th, 1938 in Larkin Hall. Dr. Thompson entered the Burmese Pak Kwai Mu with much newspaper publicity, in both print and photograph. This produced a near crisis among the local Siamese breeders.

They rather heatedly rejected

Another male imported by Dr. Thompson, and two or so by Mr. Fisher of Georgia shortly thereafter added impetus to the breeding program. By the early 1940's the breed began to regain it's former glory. Dark Sable coats returned; a great improvement in type was forthcoming. Points not so readily regained were the high domed tophead, and the eye color. Time has proved it to be some 20 years before those two factors returned in any number of cats.

Mrs. Cobb, well known breeder of Siamese cats in Boston took some of the Burmese, and working with the Bar Harbor, Maine, research center proved by careful, scientific breeding that the Sable Burmese were actually a breed, and not just a passing color. This experiment, plus the regaining of type and color caused a revival of interest among both breeders and judges, as well as a more favorable attitude from the associations.

This breed of cat was confined almost entirely to the West Coast until the mid '40's when it spread rather rapidly about the country in a sudden surge of popularity. Not all the animals sold about the country as breeding stock were show stock, by any stretch of the imagination. Human nature being what it is, many of these new breeders at once felt that their specific cat should head up a new standard, and so made request, instead of trying to conform to the standard in hand.

As the cats out here in California were by and large in the hand; of experienced breeders, these hordes of new, young breeders presented an alarming picture. With the cat fancy consisting of several associations instead of just one, as with the dog world, this has led from time to time to several different standards for the same cat; adding confusion



Early Burmese Male 1942

for both breeders as well as judges.

Our shorthairs present a very sorry story in comparison to the Long Hairs right from the beginning of the cat fancy in America. Here it started mainly with Long Hair cats, called Persians. As the English breeders had started well before us,

they had wisely decided on a single standard for Persians; our American counterparts decided upon the same standard, and all have worked together for approximately 100 years in unison! They have profited greatly in the so-doing, and I feel very strongly that this is the answer to the so often asked question of "Why do so many top wins go to the Persian cats". Because the breeders have earned the wins through co-

operation—the short hair breeders refuse to cooperate for any length of time, going off in half a dozen different directions, with the result that short hairs look different, everywhere you judge them. This is to the everlasting discredit of the breeders, and is evident in their disappointment in regards show wins.

The early Burmese breeders were quite amazed at the disposition and personality of these new cats. From the first import, they proved to be fighters of such fierceness and to persevere in this habit to the extent that it was difficult to house two of the males within either sight or sound of each other. Females being almost, if not as bad about fighting as males. This prevented interested breeders in housing many of them together, as they had done with less temperamental breeds. I cannot see that this trait of the breed has changed a whit in 30 years.

Both Dr. Thompson and Mr. Fisher wrote extensively of the common tendency of some males to reject the breeding females in preference to the shoulder of the owner. Forced into close contact with the hated intruder, fierce attacks upon the females often resulted. To successfully bring these matings to a conclusion, great care and time were necessary.



Joey Sing 1950*

The love of the Burmese cat for his owner has been likened time and time again to that of the Doberman dog; and likewise his keen proprietary sense in regards his home and property. Burmese cats at large will keep

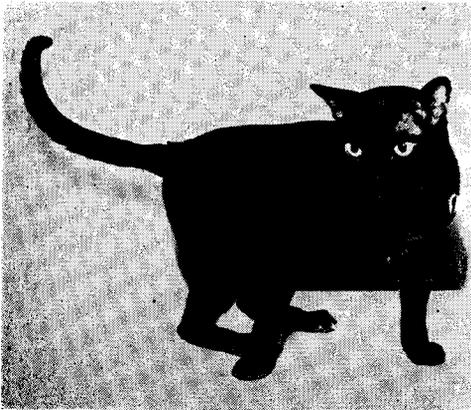
all trespassers from their property, and with a right good will. I believe that no other cat gives as much affection, without reservation, as the Burmese; and in turn, requires much love and affection in order to live a happy life.

One of the greatest ills of this Burmese breeding program has been the continuous inbreeding. Many new breeders do not understand that they are inbreeding an already inbred lot of cats. Every single Burmese cat goes right back to Wong Mau—pedigrees run back for many generations show all the same names, just differently arranged. We have had no new blood imported for 20 years. Every other breed, Persians, Siamese, Russian Blues, Manx, Abyss, all have had rather frequent importation of animals from abroad. This should be rectified at once through the medium of imports from Burma or Hong Kong, or we face eventual destruction of the breed.

*Ruth Gramley Burmese breeder *only* for 17 years.

We all know that inbreeding for successive generations, of any animal, produces change—and not always desirable. Inbreeding does not set any new faults, but does intensify such faults as the parent stock carries already. We know with Burmese it can cause color change, set white spots, cause diseases of the blood, disease of the bone, change disposition and bring about what Dr. Thompson called “dwarfism” the curse of the Burmese breed.

What, the novice may ask, is inbreeding? To give a loosely worded explanation; matings of father to daughter, mother to son or sibling matings. Line breeding is matings of less closely related cats, such as uncle to niece; cousins, etc. Bear in mind that many of the earlier Burmese breeders “burned out” their strain through the medium of too close breedings. The average length of time for them to work, before admitting defeat was from three to five years, then a sudden deterioration of cats caused them to give up the breed.



Mizpah's Trotsky of G(Len)N*

Many breeders are puzzled as to numerous references in early cat literature to similarities in type to the Siamese, and as to just what the expression “Oriental type” means. Let us explode this myth of “Oriental type” through explanation. Many Siamese have been imported directly into California from Siam. Of these cats, only a handful could be called “show-type” by today’s standards. The large majority have

been large cats; round of head and eye, heavy of bone, stocky in build. The only similarity between them and show type Siamese being in the color. They did look, type wise, just about like the Burmese imports.

In seeking factual reference to cats Oriental, let us quote verbatim from the Encyclopedia Britannica. “Throughout the Orient, Japan, China, Siam and Burma (the Malay Peninsula) normal long-tailed cats are seldom seen. Instead the cats have more or less an abbreviated tail, club or half tails. The same type of cat is found in Madagascar.”

*Burmese male, breeder Vivian Chartier; owner, Hope Simons, Maryland.



Dbl. Ch. Chi-Sai Kowan**

Other Encyclopaedias make mention of the "Oriental type" as being "short of body, cobby in structure, with short kinked tails, ear tufts, being spotted or striped." Based upon such evidence, these modern day Siamese show cats can hardly be termed "Oriental" in type, if we regard Encyclopedias as factual source material. It then appears that today's type in the Siamese cat is a man-made thing, and has little to do with animals native to the Orient. The many Orientals living in San Francisco, and the International House at University of California concur on this point.

The Siamese certainly has an origin quite distinct from the ordinary European (termed domestic type); this being rendered evident by its peculiar cry. There is also in Burma and Siam a "WHOLLY DIFFERENT CHOCOLATE COLORED CAT, POSSESSING YELLOW OR ORANGE EYES" quotes another Encyclopaedia. Where did this type of cat come from? And what is the relationship of the Siamese and Burmese? Of this we have no written proof. The answer to this, as to much of history past and gone, is lost in the mists of time. We can but conjecture; with so many Burmese being found in northern India, did



Gr. Ch. Tzaana's Rangoon of Yindling*

the Indian hordes that swept across these countries during the 14th century leaving their mark in architecture and religion, imposed upon the conquered peoples, perhaps bring with them this Sable colored cat? To cross with the local Malayan cat, producing what we know today as Burmese cats? It is evident that both Burmese and Siamese are first cousins, and both descended in part from the cats native to the Malay Peninsula.

Here on the West Coast where the breed has flourished for 34 years, the breeders have honestly endeavored to retain the original type. We have no wish to distort this breed, nor to make of it a mockery, bearing but little resemblance to the majestic imports that graced the early breeding programs. We have tried to maintain the rounded heads, the large round eyes; the heavy bone, broad shoulders, flat backs and the shorter bodies, legs and tails that make this breed stand apart.

*Breeders Doctors Val & Mary Jaros; owner Mrs. Springer.

**Grandson of Prince Pogo of Regal, out of Quad Champ Ch. Chi-Sai Koket and Ch. Chi-Sai Khwan, Pogo's Son, breeder Christine Streetman.