

ACFA Reinstates the Bengals

By: Libbie Kerr

At the August, 1997 meeting of the ACFA Board of Directors, the Bengals were reinstated to New Breed and Color (NBC) status, effective immediately.

The Bengal has a "spotted history" with ACFA beginning and ending in 1991. A second generation foundation cat was being shown in 1991, retrospect allows us to see the error. This situation led to further clarification of what a "Bengal" is versus, what is referred to as, a "Foundation Cat". This understanding is basic in understanding the future of the Bengal.

The first three generations from the non-domestic breeding are referred to as Foundation Cats, in this case, Foundation Cats for the Bengal. It is not until the fourth generation that the term Bengal applies to the offspring. The reason this needs to be clear and understood is that they are two different animals in behavior and, often, in appearance. The Asian leopard cat (ALC) is a very shy wild cat (weighing 5-12 pounds) that hybridizes with domestic cats. Hybridization has occurred in the wild for years, but in the development of the Bengal began as a scientific study of immunity to FeLV in the early 1970s. (This research has human applications now and is being studied by the National Cancer Institute.) In 1984, Jean Mill, began registering the Bengal with the object of creating a domestic cat, many generations removed from the shy ancestor, that looks like small forest dwelling cats, but does not behave like them. In 1997, there are over 15,500 Bengals Registered with TICA and over 300 champions... obviously, this is a concept that has "caught on"!

Let me reiterate the main points:

1. A Bengal is at least four generations removed from the original ALC cross. In the case of ACFA, we have to be 5 generations removed, and only one ALC can be seen in the 5th generation.
2. Foundation Cats are one, two, and three generations removed from the ALC cross.
3. The intention of breeding Bengals is to create a cat that have a phenotype of the ALC, not the temperament. Temperament is even written into our standard.
4. The Bengal breeders are not to advertise for sale or bring to the ACFA any cats that are not Bengals. That refers specifically to Foundation Cats.

The challenge of breeding Bengals is how to do this. By the selective breeding of friendly, people loving cats that carry the characteristics readily identified as "wild looking".... such as resetting (two toned spots, that can be shaped like doughnuts, paw prints, arrowheads) strong contrast (minimal change in the agouti banding colors) random patterning (not vertically aligned) and our wish list of: small ears, low on the head, white tummies.... There are some "new" (TICA, 1995) colors and patterns you will be seeing. When I learn the ACFA language of terms I will translate them to you. Meanwhile think: brown tones with contrasting spots, cream tones with contrasting spots and both colors with swirled "marble" patterns.

The Bengal is a developing breed that is incredibly popular. The result, in my opinion, is not always a good one. There are breeders creating cats that look nothing like what we are trying to produce. The market is flooded with these "pet" Bengals that sell for fancy prices and fancy promises. Education of the public is the key and the American Cat Fanciers Association will be another forum.

This education began at the Kentuckiana Show over the Labor Day Weekend. Martha Battenfeld took a male, adult Bengal to the show who purred his way into the show hall and throughout every ring. Martha enjoyed the show, got to be a TV star, and was thrilled with the welcome she received. She is eager to go again and is encouraging others to show. This will not be a problem... Bengals are here and will be a very present part of ACFA.

I have been working with Bengals for eight years and was attracted to them because of the temperament issue. It intrigued me that temperament could be affected by selection and the Bengal was the perfect cat for this study. It is my contention that careful selection allows the phenotype to remain true while creating little, loving pets. Why have a beautiful animal if it does not want to be around you?

Because of my background in education, teaching, writing and speaking, I have enjoyed presenting these ideas and working with them. I have had articles published and will be working more in the area of "Inheritance of Temperament" using Bengals as the example, but it applies to all breeds of cats, and any living form.

I am a past president of The International Bengal Cat Society, serve on many committees for TIBCS, Member of the Bengal Breed Committee for TICA, Chair of the Bengal Breed Committee for ACFA. I work with Ohio Wesleyan University and some with Ohio State Veterinary College concentrating on Feline Behavior (students from the colleges observe at my cattery), attend numerous seminars on feline behavior and read and study.

I am breeding 11 and 12 generations from the ALC and have clear coats, rosetted patterns and wonderful temperaments. I know for a fact that we can get the phenotype from the ALC and have wonderful temperament. The challenge is one that I enjoy -- working generation by generation, loving the cat in hand while appreciating what it might just carry on to the next generation. These are wonderful, people interactive cats that are fun to live with and show. I look forward to meeting many of you at shows and hope that you will feel free to contact me at any time with concerns or questions.

I am pleased to have a "spot" in ACFA and look forward to Championship classes!! Keep us on our behavior, and remember, it is not so much the wild blood in the cats you have to be concerned with.... it's the wild blood in the owners!!!!