

## THE SIAMESE CAT: WHERE DID IT COME FROM

The Siamese cat is one of the most renowned and popular breeds of cat in the world today. With their distinct dark coloured points, beautiful almond shaped blue eyes and elegant, sleek bodies along with friendly, charming and sociable personalities they can make an ideal pet and companion.

One of the earliest manuscripts to mention a cat with the appearance of a Siamese is found in the '*Tamra Maew*': the Cat Book Poems: a collection of ancient manuscripts from the Ayutthaya Kingdom (1351-1767 AD).

The author states that the breed is '*pointed*', a reference to the distinct markings of darkened points: feet, tail, ears, and masked face. Within this sacred publication is asserted by the monks that the Siamese cat: '*.... should be sought after as they would bring great honour and prosperity to their owner.*' Over a dozen of these manuscripts are now kept in the National Library of Thailand, the British Library and National Library of Australia.

Although the actual origin of the breed is difficult to prove, there are many stories mentioning that the first Siamese cats belonged to the Royal Family of Siam (*now Thailand*) and that the people of Siam believed their cats received their souls at death. These cats resided in the Temples and in the Royal Palace of Bangkok where they were closely guarded to keep the breed pure. At the time Siamese cats were used as guardians of the Temples and their blood lines were impeccably preserved. A Siamese cat was never sold and it was a great honour to be given one as a gift.

It was during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, 1884 that a pair of these Royal Sacred Siamese or Seal Point (24) were given to the British Consul-General in Bangkok, Edward Blencowe Gould (1847–1916) by the King of Siam. The cat's names were: Pho and Mai. He later gave them to his sister in England, Lilian Jane Gould, who in 1895 married and became Lilian Jane Veley. She formed the Siamese Cat Club in 1901, UK. In 1885, in England, Pho and Mia gave birth to three Siamese kittens: Duen Ngai, Kalohom, and Khromata. They were all shown at the first Cat Show at Crystal Palace in London the same year. Out of 480 entries in the show they became Best in Show winner.

With their unique appearance and distinct behaviour this new breed of cat created high interest but unfortunately all three of the kittens passed away shortly after the show although the cause of death remains unknown. This is the first known authentic record written about the Siamese cat that was in catalogues and journals. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Siamese cat became well established in the UK, the number of these cats increased by breeding and imports from Bangkok.

As the popularity of the Siamese cat grew so did the enthusiasm for breeding this unique type of cat and this spread to America with two cats exported by Lady Marcus Beresford to Mrs Clinton Locke, the founder of the American Cat Fancy.

These two seal point Siamese were exhibited at the Chicago Cat Show in 1902 taking out the Best in Show awards.

It was at the Holland House Cat Show in 1896 that the Judge: Louis Wain refused to judge a Siamese cat because it was blue and not seal as all Siamese up to then were seal. Very few Breeders at that time were interested in developing other colours although there were stories about '*strange*' coloured kittens popping up in some litters. In the 1930's a group of Breeders took up the challenge and in 1936 the governing body granted the Blue Point Siamese its official number: 24A.

The chocolate point took longer to gain recognition with a male kitten born in 1931 being a much lighter seal colour although it wasn't until 1950 that the Chocolate Point was officially recognised with the breed number 24B. The pioneer was Miss E Wentworth Fitzwilliam.

The Lilac Point 24C was produced by the combination of two genes: the blue and the chocolate dilutes. There are no records of how this fourth colour was developed although it had emerged by 1955 and was recognised by the Cat Fanciers Association (*CFA*) in the USA and known at the time as '*frost points*'.

In 1946 Mrs Hargraves commenced her '*experimental*' breeding program and mated a seal point with a Russian blue with a further generation: Laurentide Mercury being born. Due to a controversy with this, a decision was made to have two Judges inspect Mercury with regards to his colour registration. Mercury was then placed on the supplementary register as a lilac point: with his progeny to be placed on a full register.

In the 1950's and 1960's, as the Siamese became extremely popular, many Breeders and Cat Show Judges began to favour the more slender, sleek type of look. As a result of selective breeding they created longer, fine-boned, narrow-headed cats which resulted in the modern show look of Siamese cat. A Siamese extremely elongated, with a lean, tubular body and long, slender legs plus a very long tail. The head wedge shaped with straight lines topped by extremely large, wide-set ears with the outline of the head and ears forming an equilateral triangle when viewed from the front. Neck long and slender.

By the mid 1980's, cats of the original style had largely disappeared from Cat Shows but a few Breeders, particularly in the UK, continued to breed and register them, resulting in today's two types of Siamese: the modern, '*show style*' Siamese, and the more '*Traditional Siamese*' that are also known as '*Old-style Siamese*', '*Classic Siamese*', and '*Apple head*'.

Breeders then continued to develop new colours and patterns in the UK and these were given the breed number 26 by the Governing Council but only the four '*true*' colours were allowed to use breed number 24.

In 1966 the '*man made*' Colourpoint Siamese in Australia were given breed number 32 that includes: tabby, tortie, red and cream points and came in a wide range of colours including seal, blue, chocolate, lilac, tabby, red, cream, and tortie points. They were bred from a Siamese to other breeds to create a whole array of colours and although they generally look like a Siamese they have a different genetic background.

The Siamese cat was also used to create other '*man made*' breeds such as the Foreign White, the Oriental, the Burmese, the Balinese, the Himalayan Longhair, Ragdoll, Tonkinese, Snowshoe plus the Si Rex among others.

A '*pure*' Siamese can only come in the four '*true*' colours: seal, blue, chocolate and lilac points. Cats NSW specify a code number on the pure Siamese pedigrees: EMS code: SIA that will confirm that the Siamese cat is from a '*pure*' lineage.

## **THE HISTORY OF THE SIAMESE CAT IN AUSTRALIA**

The first official document states that two Siamese imports: two neutered seal points were sent by ship from the UK in 1902. The sea journey took nearly six months and both cats, sadly passed away shortly after reaching Sydney. It was in 1924 the first breeding pair of Siamese cats arrived, two seal points imported by Mr & Mrs Lonsdale of the Woodroffe Cattery. These two cats then became the foundation breeding stock for many Australian breeders.

The first Cat Club in Australia was established in NSW: the NSW Cat Fanciers Association (NSW CFA) and in 1925 they held their first show on a tennis court at Strathfield at the home of the Lonsdales.

Mrs Lynfae Rudder, their daughter became an all breeds Judge and a permanent member of the Royal Agricultural Society Consultative Committee (RASCC).

It was in NSW in 1949 that the Royal Agricultural Society Cat Club was formed and it became the central registering body for NSW. Up until 1950 the Royal Sacred seal point Siamese was the only colour recognised but then two Breeders: Mr & Mrs Hine imported a 24A (blue point) Velvet Mask Delphine and Kaybee Clematis from the UK.

Mr & Mrs Chandler in Victoria also imported a blue point: Misselfore Panella a male and Lela Do a female but sadly the male passed away. Timoshenko, a seal point male, that was bred from imported UK parents, proved to be carrying chocolate and Mrs Gabriella Kaufman in NSW produced Bluemead Suki and Polisson both 24B, chocolates.

As the blues and chocolates were now established in 1960 the lilac points followed with a lilac male: Annelida Lilac Nikomis and Supra Lollypop a lilac female were

imported from the UK by Mrs Maloney and Mr Scott. Dr Pakham in Western Australia also bred these lilac colours.

Dame Nellie Melba, the famous Australian operatic soprano (1861-1931) apparently owned a pet seal point Siamese neuter.

## MYTHS ABOUT THE SIAMESE CAT

The kinked tail (*a cat's tail with a bend in it*) and crossed eyes that have now almost been bred out this breed were looked upon in ancient Siam (*now Thailand*) with great favour. These cats were used as guards in the ancient temples.

Ancient myths state that the Royal Princesses used the Siamese cat's tail to keep their rings safe while bathing. The cat knotted their tail to prevent the precious jewellery from becoming lost.

Another myth states that during a fierce battle the Siamese temple cats were left to guard a valuable relic. The cats watched the relic so intently that their eyes became crossed. Some of the cats then wrapped their tails around the base of the relic to prevent it being stolen and their tails remained bent or kinked.

There is another myth that states that Siamese cats were used as ring holders by the Royal Princesses and that is how the kinks arose. At this time no one except the King and members of the Royal family were permitted to own one. Siamese cats at that time were said to have special powers.

The Siamese cat is renowned for its beautiful vivid blue eyes. There is a story about a group of invaders who came to rob the Temple where the cats resided. These invaders headed straight for the Temple's altar where all the valuables were kept to rob the Temple of everything. When they reached the altar though, they found Siamese cats sitting on the altar steps. The cats glared ferociously at the invaders with fiery red eyes. The cats shown the invaders their sharp claws and teeth: the cats meowed loudly. The invaders then fled. When the monks returned to what they thought was going to be a ransacked Temple they found everything intact. The eyes of the cats all turned a brilliant sapphire blue which was thought to be a *'thank you'* gift sent from heaven for saving the holy altar.

Siamese cats in ancient Siam were believed to avert evil spirits and the people believed a Siamese cat would bring good luck to their owner.

Siamese cats were said to defend the King of Siam. The cats apparently sat on tall columns around the throne and if anyone threatened the King or if the cats thought someone was a threat to the monarch, they would jump down and attack the person, knocking them to the ground and attacking them with their claws.

There is even a story about Noah's Ark. During the long weeks of the voyage, Noah had already selected two of each of the animals for his Ark, and it was while they were waiting for the flood waters to subside that some of the animals got bored. A romantic '*liaison*' took place between a naughty monkey and a lioness.

This mating resulted in the arrival of the first Siamese cat which is said to have '*the attributes of a monkey and the bravery of a lion*'.

We can then see where the Siamese cat obtains its personality, playfulness, mischief and sheer '*love*' for their owner. If you have never been greeted at the door after a '*hard day at work*' by a Siamese cat then you will never understand what feline love is.

Siamese love human company and make wonderful companions. They will share your joys and sorrows, are devoted and loyal to their owners. Once you have owned a Siamese you will never really want to be without one.

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