

Abyssinian

Breed Organization

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Native Country

Asia

Other Names

Aby, Bunny Cat (chat lapin)

Breed Description

Head: Wedge-shaped, with slightly rounded contours; without flat planes. Arched brow. The moderately long nose bridge must never be straight; no break. The profile lines of the head show a gentle contour. Jowls are allowed in mature males. Muzzle not sharply pointed; no whisker pinch. Strong, well-developed, rounded chin, neither receding nor protruding.

Eyes: Large, almond-shaped, wide-set. Accentuated by a fine dark line of the base color and encircled by a light-colored area. Brilliant, expressive, of one intense color. Yellow (gold), green, and amber.

Neck: Rather long and gracefully arched.

Body: Medium in length and build, lithe, strong, and muscular. Rounded rib cage. Slightly arched back.

Paw: Long, straight, fine-boned. Small, oval, compact paws. The cat gives the impression of being on tiptoe.

Tail: Fairly long, thick at the base and tapering to the tip.

Coat: Thick, dense, and resilient to the touch, lying close against the skin. Short in length or medium particularly along the spine. Ticking (two or three bands of alternating dark or light color on each hair shaft) similar to the coat of a rabbit. Ticking is not present on the throat, underside, or inside of legs.

Fault: Long (like that of a Siamese) or round head. Small or pointed ears. Round eyes. Overly massive body. Dull, fluffy coat.

Disqualify: White locket or white anywhere on the body, other than the nostrils, chin and throat.

History

The exact origins of the Abyssinian, one of the oldest breeds, remain a mystery. Perhaps it originated in Ethiopia, formally known as Abyssinia. Unfortunately, there is no record of agouti cats in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, since it resembles the sacred cat of Ancient Egypt, legend holds that the Abyssinian was born along the banks of the Nile. In fact, it is said that Ramses II asked the king of Abyssinia for a band of cats to take back to Egypt. Cats sporting a coat similar to the Abyssinian can also be found in Africa, Eurasia, and Asia, including Felis Libyca, the African Wild Cat or Gloved Cat, and Felis chaus, the Swamp Cat or Jungle Cat. However, the existence of ticked coloring in India and Asia makes it more likely that the Abyssinian originated in Asia.

Behavior

The Abyssinian is a very active, extroverted, playful feline that is curious about its surroundings and has a well-balanced temperament. This cat has a strong, independent personality, but is social and affectionate. Very gentle and loving, the Aby requires considerable attention, despises solitude, and is devoted to its family. The Aby is talkative,

but its voice is very quiet. The exuberance seen in young kittens mellows with age. Grooming is simple. The Aby requires only weekly brushing and combing. When shedding, dead, loose hairs must be removed regularly. For a shiny coat, rub the coat with a chamois cloth. If the cat will tolerate it, bathe him with an appropriate shampoo two days prior to a show.

Physical Characteristics - General Feline Information

Sight: Testing indicates that a cat's vision is superior at night in comparison to humans, and inferior in daylight. Cats, like dogs and many other animals, have a tapetum lucidum that reflects extra light to the retina. While this enhances the ability to see in low light, it appears to reduce net visual acuity, thus detracting when light is abundant. In very bright light, the slit-like iris closes very narrowly over the eye, reducing the amount of light on the sensitive retina, and improving depth of field. The tapetum and other mechanisms give the cat a minimum light detection threshold up to seven times lower than that of humans. Variation in color of cats' eyes in flash photographs is largely due to the interaction of the flash with the tapetum.

Average cats have a visual field of view estimated at 200°, versus 180° in humans, with a binocular field (overlap in the images from each eye) narrower than that of humans. As with most predators, their eyes face forward, affording depth perception at the expense of field of view. Field of view is largely dependent upon the placement of the eyes, but may also be related to the eye's construction. Instead of the fovea which gives humans sharp central vision, cats have a central band known as the visual streak. Cats can apparently differentiate among colors, especially at close range, but without appreciable subtlety.

Cats have a third eyelid, the nictitating membrane, which is a thin cover that closes from the side and appears when the cat's eyelid opens. This membrane partially closes if the cat is sick; although in a sleepy, content cat this membrane is often visible. If a cat chronically shows the third eyelid, it should be taken to a veterinarian for evaluation.

Unlike humans, cats do not need to blink their eyes on a regular basis to keep their eyes lubricated (with tears). Unblinking eyes are probably an advantage when hunting. Cats will, however, "squint" their eyes, usually as a form of communication. Cat owners can often entice their pets to squint or even fully close their eyes just by talking to them in a soothing or pleasing manner. Many cats will also squint in response to seeing their owners squint.

Cats have a wide variation in eye color, the most typical colors being golden, green and orange. Blue eyes are usually associated with the Siamese breed, but they are also found in white cats. If a white cat has two blue eyes, it is often times deaf; however, orange eyes usually indicate the cat is free of hearing problems. White cats having one blue and one other-colored eye are called "odd-eyed" and may be deaf on the same side as the blue eye. This is the result of the yellow iris pigmentation rising to the surface of only one eye, as blue eyes are normal at birth before the adult pigmentation has had a chance to express itself in the eye(s).

Hearing: Humans and cats have a similar range of hearing on the low end of the scale, but cats can hear much higher-pitched sounds, up to 70 kHz, which is 1.6 octaves above the range of a human, and even 1 octave above the range of a dog.

When listening for something, a cat's ears will swivel in that direction; a cat's ear flaps (pinnae) can independently point backwards as well as forwards and sideways to pinpoint the source of the sound. Cats can judge within three inches (7.5 cm) the location of a sound being made one yard (approximately one meter) away-this can be useful for localizing prey, etc.

Smell: A domestic cat's sense of smell is about fourteen times as strong as a human's. Cats have twice as many smell-sensitive cells in their noses as people do, which means they can smell things we are not even aware of. Cats also have a scent organ in the roof of their mouths called the vomeronasal, or Jacobson's organ. When a cat wrinkles its muzzle, lowers its chin, and lets its tongue hang a bit, it is opening the passage to the vomeronasal. This is called gaping, "sneering", or "flehming". Gaping is the equivalent of the Flehmen response in other animals, such as dogs, horses and big cats.

Touch: A cat has about twenty-four movable vibrissae ("whiskers"), in four rows on each upper lip on each side of its nose (some cats may have more), in addition to a few on each cheek, tufts over the eyes, bristles on the chin, the cat's inner "wrists", and at the back of the legs. The Sphynx (a nearly hairless breed) may have full length, short, or no whiskers at all. Vibrissae aid navigation and sensation. The upper two rows of whiskers can move independently from the lower two rows for even more precise measuring. Whiskers are more than twice as thick as ordinary hairs, and their roots are set three times deeper than hairs in a cat's tissue.

Richly supplied with nerve endings at their base, whiskers give cats extraordinarily detailed information about air movements, air pressure and anything they touch. Vibrissae possess exquisite sensitivity to vibrations in air currents. As air swirls and eddies around objects, whiskers vibrate too. Whiskers may detect very small shifts in air currents, enabling a cat to know it is near obstructions without actually seeing them. Cats use messages in these vibrations to sense the presence, size, and shape of obstacles without seeing or touching them.

Whiskers are also good hunting tools. The structure of the brain region which receives information from the vibrissae is similar to that found in the visual cortex, suggesting that the nature of the cat's perception through its whiskers is similar to that via its vision. Stop motion photography reveals that at the moment a cat's prey is so close to its mouth to be too near for accurate vision, its whiskers move so as to form a basket shape around its muzzle in order to precisely detect the prey's location. A cat whose whiskers have been damaged may bite the wrong part of a mouse it's attacking, indicating that signals from these delicate structures provide cats with vital information about the shape and activity of its prey - interestingly, whiskers also help cats detect scents. It is thought that a cat may choose to rely on the whiskers in dim light where fully dilating the pupils would reduce its ability to focus on close objects. The whiskers also spread out roughly as wide as the cat's body making it able to judge if it can fit through an opening. Whiskers are also an indication of the cat's attitude. Whiskers point forward when the cat is inquisitive and friendly, and lie flat on the face when the cat is being defensive or aggressive. Whiskers can also be a bother to a cat, especially when the cat tries to eat food out of a bowl. The end of the whiskers touching the side of the bowl transfer irritating sensations to its brain, making it hard for it to continue eating.

Taste: The cat family was shown in 2005 to lack the T1R2 protein, one of two required for function of the sweetness sensory receptor; a deletion in the relevant gene (Tas1r2) causes a shift in the genetic reading frame, leading to transcription stopping early and no detectable mRNA or protein produced. The other protein, T1R3, is present and identical to that of other animals, and the relevant taste buds are still present but inactive. Such a genetic marker found in the entire family and not other animals must be the result of a mutation in an early ancestor; as a deletion mutation it could not revert, and thus would be inherited by all descendants, as the evolutionary tree branched out. Most scientists now believe this is the root of the cat family's extremely specialized evolutionary niche as a hunter and carnivore. Their modified sense of taste would cause them to some degree to ignore plants, a large part of whose taste appeal derives from their high sugar content, in favor of a high-protein carnivorous diet, which would still stimulate their remaining taste receptors.

Understanding Cat Body Language

Many people fail to understand the silent body language of cats. In particular, people who are accustomed to the outwards signs of dog body language seem slow in detecting what a cat is telling them in its body language, which creates the false impression that cats are cold-hearted, unemotional, or unintelligent. To understand cats, one must observe a feline closely and learn what its body signals tell them. It is important to keep in mind that each cat may display its emotions with different body language. The flattened ears, teeth showing, baring belly for submission are easily 'read' by humans. Some characteristic signals, however, are often misunderstood. For instance, a cat rubbing its body along an arm or leg of its human is not only a way in which to attract attention and, perhaps, a morsel of food; it is also a way of 'marking' its human as its own. Using scent glands located around its mouth and elsewhere, it subtly 'marks' its human as part of its cat territory. Most cats prefer gentle rubs behind the ears. To inform their humans they need petting or attention, a cat may push its entire body weight up against the human as the cat snuggles next to his/her favorite person.

Disgust - Lifting and subsequent shaking of a paw or paws. The more paws, the stronger a feeling is indicated; this can sometimes be a four paw affair with each paw being lifted and shaken in turn. This is possibly related to the identical action that's displayed after stepping in water.

Aggression - The swishing or sweeping of the tail in a wide swath, mid-air or against a person means the cat is trying to get your attention. And if the message isn't getting through, the cat may simply leave the room.

Relaxation - Sprawling on the side or back and, possibly, rolling about; this may be seen, for example, when a person enters the room or stirs from their seat. The cat may display this at the same time as the person's movement.

Greeting - A particular sort of vocalization, such as a low meow or chirp, possibly with simultaneous purring.

Affection - A pressing of the face or top of the head against a person's body, leaving a scent as a marking of territory. Rubbing in quick succession. Cats may also slowly blink as an expression of affection or security.

Submission - Upon being approached, it will fall down on its side, indicating it is not seeking attention and is unwilling to put up a fight.

Contentedness - Kneading with the paws on a person or, for example, a favorite blanket or sleeping spot. Young kittens knead their mother's nipples to stimulate the feeding reflex in her so that her milk flows for the kittens to suckle on. Cats may knead for a short or extended period of time, the extended period sometimes interpreted by people as a sign of discomfort or restlessness, but it is more likely the cat is happy. Most cats will demonstrate this for about ten minutes at the longest, although a select few have been known to knead and suckle on their favorite human's shirt over the course of an entire night. Researchers at Oxford University have demonstrated that cats derive immense pleasure from kneading.

Scent Rubbing - This behavior is used primarily to claim ownership of something: although female cats don't spray, unlike male cats. Once male cats are neutered the scent rubbing or spraying will wear out or stop.

Courting - Cats, compared to many other mammals have a unique courting style. Courtship consists of firstly the female coming into season, or heat. Male cats will be able to smell a female cat in heat miles away, and will therefore be seeking her out. This can be very problematic for any owner who has a whole female. When males arrive, they will fight mercilessly for the right to be the first to mate with the female. After the dominant male has left, the less dominant males will then each mate with the female in turn. It is therefore possible that even if a male cat loses first breeding rights, he can still be the father. This is also the reason that a litter of kittens can consist of two or sometimes even three fathers.

Cat Vocal Calls

Purring - Many people find purring as a sign of content, which it is; however, it is slightly more than that. Some cats purr when they are in extreme pain, or in labour, simply to try and calm themselves down. Purring therefore can be a sign of pleasure or pain; usually it is the former. Scientists have not yet been able to discover how purring works, but it is suspected that it is caused by minute vibrations in the voice box.

Greeting - A particular sort of vocalization, such as a low meow or chirp, possibly with simultaneous purring.

Distress - Mewing is often a plea for help or attention often made by kittens. There are two basic types of this call, one more loud and frantic, the other more high-pitched. In older cats it is more of a panicky repeated meow.

Attention - Often simple meows and mews in both older cats and young kittens. A commanding meow is for example, attention, or food.

Protest - Whining meows.

Frustration - A strong sigh or exhaled snort.

Happy - A meow that starts low then goes up and comes back down.

Watching/Interest - Cats will often "chatter" or "chirrup" on seeing something of interest out of the window, this is sometimes attributed to mimicking birdsong to attract prey or draw others attention to it, but often birds are not present. Bengals and Tabbies seem more likely to display this behavior.

Cat Socialization

It is a widely held misconception that cats are sneaky, shy, or aloof animals. Most feline shyness/aggression is a result of abuse, neglect, or poor socialization. A cat is unlike a dog in the sense that a dog will instantly trust you unless you have given it a reason not to. A cat will not trust you unless you have given it a reason to trust you.

A kitten is scared of people at first, but if it is handled and well cared for in the first 16 weeks, it will grow up into a sweet, loving cat that will enjoy human company. It is harder to socialize an adult cat, but this can be very rewarding.

Cats are not emotionally dependant on humans like dogs are, and do enjoy some "cat time" away from humans, and will let out a faint "meow" if it doesn't want to be picked up, but for the most part, a cat is a friendly companion animal.

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