

The Siberian Cat

The **Siberian** is a domestic cat breed from Russia. The cat, that has similarities with breeds Maine Coon and Norwegian Forest Cat, is a natural breed and the national cat of Russia.

It is said to be hypoallergenic and produces less Fel d1 than other cat breeds.

History

The cat was first mentioned in a book by Harrison Wier, which included information of the earliest cat shows in England in 1871. The cat was first imported to the United States in 1990, and despite the popularity, the breed is slightly rare in the US. The cat was registered by the Kotofei cat club in St. Petersburg in 1987. This cat, Dorofei, is owned by Russian president Dmitry Medvedev and former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev. WBZ-AM talk radio host Steve LeVeille mentions his Siberian "Max" on his Boston-based program.

Characteristics

The Siberian is very dog-like. They are loyal cats that will come to greet you with their unique triple purr. This cat breed appears to be fascinated with water and they are likely to drop toys in it. They are a friendly breed, good with dogs, energetic, and smart.

Body

Known to be an exceptionally agile jumper, the Siberian is a strong and powerfully built cat, with strong hindquarters and large, well rounded paws. They have barrel chests and medium sized ears, broad foreheads, and stockier builds than other cats.

Hypo-allergenic

Hypoallergenic qualities of the Siberian coat have been noted and commented on for almost ten years. While there is little scientific evidence, breeders and pet owners claim that Siberians can be hypoallergenic to many allergy sufferers. Since females of all feline breeds produce lower levels of Fel d1, Breeders often suggest that allergic families adopt female cats. If you are allergic, it is wisest to check your reactivity directly with the parent cats from whom you plan to adopt a kitten. Many people believe that the breed produces less Fel d1, the primary allergen present on cats.

In 1999 Indoor Biotechnologies tested the fur of four cats for Fel d 1; a mixed breed, two Siberians, and an Abyssinian. The results showed the Siberian and Abyssinian cat fur as having lower Fel d 1 levels than the mixed breed cat. Indoor Biotechnologies cautions that the Siberian levels were still high, and that the mixed breed sample was "exceptionally high." Indoor Biotechnologies warns against using these results to make decisions of pet ownership.

This "test" of fur levels is shown on many Siberian breeder websites as "proof" the breed is hypoallergenic. The sample size is below statistical significance, was submitted by a Siberian breeder, and as mentioned, one cat was found to have Fel d1 allergen levels of 62,813 micrograms (roughly 60x higher than any published professional study).

A not-for-profit association of breeders, (Siberian Research Inc), was founded in 2005 to study allergen levels and genetic diseases in the Siberian breed. As of March 2010, fur and saliva samples from over 300 Siberians have been submitted for analysis, many directly from a veterinarian. Salivary Fel d1 allergen levels in Siberians ranged from 0.08-27 mcg per ml of saliva, while fur levels ranged from 5-1300 mcg. The high-end of these ranges is very consistent with results from prior studies, though the low end is below expected results.

All Siberians tested were found to produce some Fel d1, with the highest levels being found in Siberians that were "Silver" colored. About half of Siberians were found to have Fel d1 levels lower than other breeds, while under twenty percent would be considered very low. Within the low group, males and females had comparable allergen levels.

What is Fel d 1?

The protein **Fel d 1**, produced largely by cat saliva and sebaceous glands, is the primary allergen present on cats. The protein is of an unknown function to the animal but causes an IgG or IgE reaction in sensitive humans (either as an allergic or asthmatic response). Removal of soft surfaces in the home (carpet, furniture), frequent washings of bed linens, HEPA filters and even washing cats have been proven to reduce the amounts of Fel d 1 present in the home. Fel d 1 is a particularly sticky protein and has been shown to cling to clothing and human hair and can be detected in environments where a cat has never been present.

Cats produce, on average, 2-7 µg of Fel d 1 per day. Studies have shown that intact males produce Fel d 1 in levels higher than castrated males, leading to the assumption that Fel d 1 is hormonally regulated by testosterone. Castrated males produce Fel d 1 in levels similar to females (both intact and altered females produce Fel d 1 in similar levels). Even though females and castrated males produce Fel d 1 in lower levels, they still produce enough to cause allergic symptoms in sensitive individuals.

Fel d 1 is an 18 kDa heterodimer protein and belongs to the secretoglobin family of small disulfide linked dimeric proteins found only in mammals.

Siberian Fur

Siberians express the three natural types of feline fur: guard hairs, awn hairs, and down. These three layers protect the cat from the Russian weather extremes, and provide a hearty, easy to care for coat today. The fur is textured but glossy, which means matting is rare. A twice weekly combing is enough to keep the coat in good condition.

As with most other cat breeds, color varieties of the Siberian vary and all colors, such as tabby, solid, tortoiseshell and colorpoint, are genetically possible. The Siberian cat breed does not have any unusual, distinct, or unique fur colorations or patterns. Most breeders, enthusiasts, organizations, main registries such as GCCF, TICA and the WCF, and countries accept the color point coloration as being a natural Siberian. Color point Siberians are also known as "Neva-Masquerade". Neva for the river where they are said to have originated, and masquerade, for the mask.

Siberian cats molt once, sometimes twice, a year. The first molt is at the end of winter. The winter molt is instigated not by a change in temperature but by a change in day length. Many Siberians will experience a less intense "mini molt" at the end of the summer season. Perhaps this molt was intended to rid the fur of brambles and briars in the coat in preparation for the development of the heavy winter coat.

Reproduction

Siberian cats tend to come into reproductive readiness earlier than other breeds, sometimes as young as five months. It is thought that this is related to the breed's closeness to its natural wild state. Feral cats have difficult lives, often dying young. Therefore, it is a genetic advantage to achieve reproductive ability early and to have large litters. On average, a Siberian litter consists of five to six kittens, as compared to the average litter of three to four kittens in breeds who have been registered as pedigreed cats for many decades. Occasionally, Siberian litters consist of as few as one and as many as nine kittens.

Siberian cats are excellent parents, with the fathers helping to care for kittens if they are allowed access to the nest. Parents are often strongly bonded, and some mothers will only mate with one male. Even teenage male Siberians have been seen cuddling and grooming their cousins and siblings. This friendly, caring characteristic translates into a breed of cat who makes a wonderful household pet. Siberians, due to their communal nature, are often happier in pairs. Having a cat buddy to live with ensures Siberians remain active, engaged, and emotionally healthy their whole lives.

If a Siberian is not desexed, some queens (females) have been noted to have litters as late as nine or ten years. However, kitten mortality is generally lower when the queens are between 18 months and five or six years of age. This is due to several factors: physical and emotional maturation of the female, health and vitality of the queen, and nature's predisposition to healthier offspring from younger mothers.

Males can easily father kittens from as young as five months, to over ten years. In regions where the breed is rare and expensive a long term breeding career for a pedigreed male can create a risk of Popular Sire Syndrome, in which one male has an overly large genetic influence on the breed. In Eastern Europe, where the breed are very common and inexpensive, this does not arise.

During the early 1990's, catteries in Russia had limited foundation stock, and the number of Siberians that had been exported to Poland, Germany, Scandinavia, and the USA was limited. Although inbreeding was common, the excellent health of the breed prevented severe damage. However, HCM was fixed in almost all lines of "golden" Siberians. The pedigree link shows a queen that died from HCM, and illustrates the level of accepted inbreeding.

Siberians are basically a very healthy breed, though many lines have been impacted by one or more genetic diseases. The most common are Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM), and Persian kidney disease (PKD-1). In an effort to reduce genetic disease in Siberians, several organizations maintain open-source reports of Siberian HCM and PKD, allowing breeders to be cautious of high-risk lines

Information from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siberian_cat