

Stirring The Standards Possum, etc.

1. Omnibus e-mail from G.K. on 13 June

The next issue isn't going to happen unless you send me something! The nominal closing date for inputs is Sunday.

What I would love to get from you, is opinions on standards questions, like

Are the current standards, produced over a decade ago, still right for Abys and Somalis, or are they resulting in type that is too extreme and causing other problems?

Should we worry about black hocks in Tawnies, given they're pretty rare and, some would say, pretty ugly?

Should we make a concerted effort to bring back ear tufts?

Who could help in producing an illustrated screed on the Abyssinian and Somali, stating in some detail what breeders in Australia are striving to produce and why, to be sent to all judges in Australia under the auspices of The Abyssinian Breeder, with a view to educating the junior ones and getting help from senior ones to achieve the breeding aims?

As well as all that, I don't really know well what's going on in our fancy outside NSW, and I really would like to get educated, by inputs which list such things as any cat regulations recently passed or under discussion, numbers of Abys/Somalis and new breeders, what cats have been recently or are about to be imported, what cats have been exported and how they are going. I expect other subscribers would also be interested, and photos are of course welcome.

2. A partial response from Helen Norwood in Perth on 16 June

Absence of Black Hocks



George sent out an email asking for articles and giving some suggestions for thought; the issue of black hocks has come up before from George, so I thought I would put together a few words.

Do other Breeders in Australia still have black hocks on their Abys? Most of mine do, and I like them. For

Black Hocks



me, watching an Aby walk away with stunning black hocks “finishes them off”.

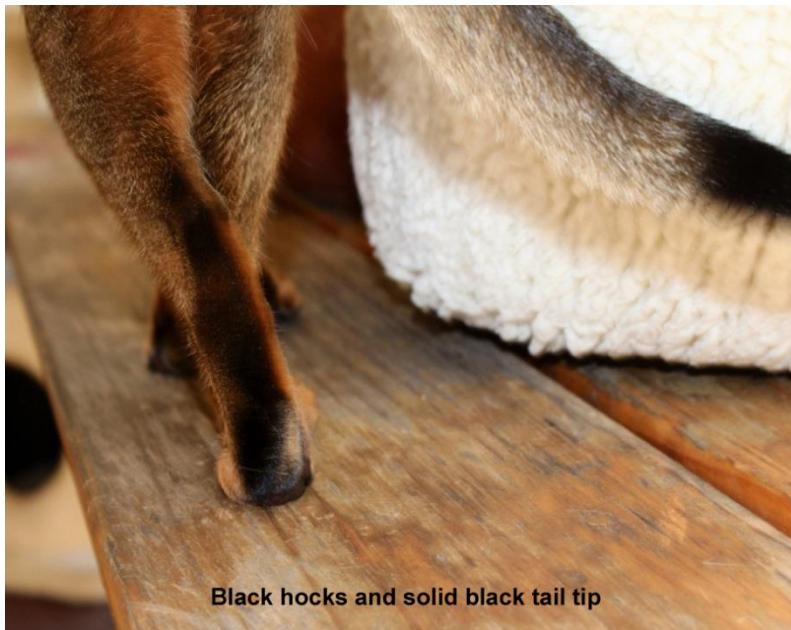
I checked the ACF & CCCA standards to make sure they were in fact still in the standards, and they are:
ACF - Tip of tail and soles of hind feet are black.

CCCA - Darker hair colour should extend from between the toes to well up the back of the hind legs, preferably to the hocks, also showing as a solid tip at the extreme end of the tail.

I then decided to have a quick look at other governing bodies' standards around the world. I read 13 of them, including CFA, TICA, FiFe, GCCF and NZCF to name a few. I was very surprised to find of the 13 I read, I could only find four that contained any mention of black hocks; the two I have already noted, GCCV whose wording is the same as CCCA. The only other one was ACFA (USA)

Although rarely seen today, some Abyssinians may exhibit ear tufts, "thumb print" markings on the back of the ears or darker coloured hocks.

So is it any wonder judges do not look for black hocks. It started me thinking when were they removed from the standard, or were they ever included in the first place?



Black hocks and solid black tail tip

Are we a bit behind the times in Australia? And possibly does the wording need to be changed for both our governing bodies to simply say "Black hocks are desirable"? I'm interested to know what other breeders think.

3. Major Response from Eileen Pittaway in Melbourne on 19 June

Hi George,

I must say I contribute with a just little reluctantly (only a little, though, ☺). Over the years I have experienced much criticism over what I have written so I decided some time ago that I wouldn't put myself in that position again. But here I am, a glutton for punishment ☺. Also, I realise that many do not help with articles and you are often scratching around for something different to write about. .. I hope what I have submitted is acceptable.

George asked:

** Are the current standards, produced over a decade ago, still right for Abys and Somalis, or are they resulting in type that is too extreme and causing other problems?*

Yes I think that a few of our Abys are becoming too extreme, but I'm not sure if this is the standard that has caused this. We are tending more towards the American type of Aby these days and this is probably more due to importation. I personally wouldn't like to see the Abys become any more extreme than they are now.

** Should we worry about black hocks in Tawnies, given they're pretty rare and, some would say, pretty ugly?*

I don't feel black hock are ugly myself. I love to see a Tawny Aby walking away showing his black hocks. This feature is still lovely to achieve and one I enjoy breeding occasionally. Just because we can't all breed black hocks in Tawnies we shouldn't just delete it from our standard. Rather, we could include in the standard that they are "desirable". There are no extra points allotted for black hocks and not too many judges would actually put a cat up or down on this feature alone.

** Should we make a concerted effort to bring back ear tufts?*

I'm not sure this would be achievable in the Abys today. Breeders have eliminated the long hair gene in our Aby gene pool for some time now. Also, as breeders have changed the shape of the ears over the years, sometimes tufts look strange on the top of a rounded ear. Tufts were always a coveted feature and it would be great to see them return again. However, in achieving this would it be sensible to keep a lesser quality cat on the basis of ear tufts alone? Again,

perhaps the standard should say “desirable”. I feel Somalis should always have tufts and they are much more achievable with the long hair gene behind them.

** Who could help in producing an illustrated screed on the Abyssinian and Somali, stating in some detail what breeders in Australia are striving to produce and why, to be sent to all judges in Australia under the auspices of The Abyssinian Breeder, with a view to educating the junior ones and getting help from senior ones to achieve the breeding aims?*



If someone starts the ball rolling (sorry I don't have the inclination), TAB breeders could be asked for their opinions/input before submitting to any judges/cat councils and any major changes are made. Having said that, I can't see much wrong with our current standard, other than a few extra tweaks here and there.

As well as all that, I don't really know well what's going on in our fancy outside NSW, and I really would like to get educated, by inputs which list such things as any cat regulations recently passed or under discussion, numbers of Abys/Somalis and new breeders, what cats have been recently or are about to be imported, what cats have been exported and how they are going. I expect other subscribers would also be interested, and photos are of course welcome.

It is very hard to say exactly what is happening in the cat fancy in Victoria. Numbers are down at shows

3. Major Response from Wendy Newton in Sydney on 23 June

In response to George's question about the Aby standard why would the standards not be right? Why would they need changing? Looking at the CCCA Standard I make the following points:

The general standard calls for a cat 'of foreign type of medium build, firm, lithe and muscular' there is nothing in this statement that I would change or say is not true of Abyssinians, that is their essence, that they are a medium sized cat that feels weighty and looks muscular. My comment here is that perhaps some Aussie Abys are getting too fine in their body structure and will lose that firm, muscularity that defines the breed.

An 'alert, active cat'; yes, that should still be true for all Abys. In regards to the coat it states 'the coat is rich, lustrous and distinctly ticked' I am sure we all

with very few new faces coming into the cat fancy. Older breeders are getting tired and lacking enthusiasm. Whether this is due to too many new local council regulations, restricting the number of cats here in Victoria that one can own, or the cost in general of vet bills and the upkeep of cats in general one will never know.

I have exported several cats to NZ, Russia, Germany, America and Belarus over the years, and more recently to a lovely breeder in China. This cat's name is Merindalee Banjo Paterson and I attached a photo of him. As for imports we have one currently in the pipeline hopefully bringing back some of our older coveted lines to incorporate with our current team ... but more on that at a later date. [See also separate article by Eileen, "The Changing Face of Abys", elsewhere in this issue.]

agree that this is another important aspect of the Abyssinian and does not need to be amended.

For the Somali all is the same except for the part about the coat which states 'medium long, sculptured coat is soft, dense, resilient and distinctly ticked' and although I don't claim to be an expert on the Somali coat I am sure this is what Somali breeders are still aiming towards.

So what has changed? The Abys certainly have changed over the last few decades but in general, has the Aby type really deviated very much from how the standard may be interpreted by different people?

My personal response to the black hock and tufts questions is that we should aim to keep both black hocks and ear tufts in the breed. More to the point why are they disappearing? I don't think breeders are

actively trying to get rid of them from the cats they breed as they are both mentioned in the standard. They must be disappearing at the expense of either keeping or reducing some other features in the Abys. Genetically, to what are these features linked? One would think that black hocks may have some connections to agouti/tabby genes and with the Abys of today being relatively free of necklacing and leg bars perhaps the black hocks have gone with it too. If hocks are classified as desirable but not essential and necklacing/bars are classified as undesirable then having the clarity in the coat would override the need to keep black hocks. Maybe the ear tufts are linked in there as well. Black hocks seem to be more prevalent than ear tufts in the Australian Abys. Is this the case in

4. The Last Word (For Now!)

It seems to have worked – three direct responses and two associated articles and more promised! Do I agree with all they say, and indeed, does it matter whether I do? “No” to both questions! But I still think that black hocks are unnecessary dark patches on an otherwise colourful cat, and in the same vein, I am pleased that black spine lines have all but vanished. Separately, having first become acquainted with Abys

Abys around the world? Or is it the Aussies breeding them both out of the breed even if it is unintentionally?

On producing an illustrated screed on the Abyssinian and Somali, I think different breeders are trying to achieve different looks according to the standard so what one breeder thinks will make the 'perfect' Aby another breeder would disagree so the potential illustrated screed would be difficult to create unless it shows the range of types trying to be bred. *[Please also see Wendy's illustrated article, "Breaking Down the Abyssinian/Somali Standard", elsewhere in this issue – Ed.]*

when ear tufts were abundant, I still hanker for them, and have a number of cats with at least small tufts.

In my view, a very good, continuing thing to result from my stirring has been Wendy Newton's well written and beautifully illustrated standards dissection, which may yet become a handout for judges and umbrella bodies, to help us preserve and/or enhance Abyssinian and Somali standards. It occurs to me that we really need a similarly analytical article on the Somali coat in the next issue.

George Kennedy