

THE KORAT *the thai "blue beauty"*

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1. INTRODUCION

If I'd have to start breeding again, I'd choose the Korats, no doubt!

Korats are special cats... people happily "owned" by them, can understand what this means... They do special things and are able to turn our lives into a very interesting experience.

Apart from the very large, round, luminous and expressive green eyes, what is that makes this breed so special? Actually, they are small cats, with short hairs, and all grey.

Nothing more than this... apparently.

In the article that follows, I'll do my best to explain the reasons why, for us Korat people, there is no life without one of these silver-blue furry creatures from Thailand. And to do it better, I'll also include contributions from other Korat breeders that I think are helpful to learn and understand more about this ancient and rare breed.

2. HISTORY AND LEGEND

If you go to Bangkok, to the National Museum, in the Fine Arts Room you may see the **Smud Khoi**, the Thai Book of the Cat. These pictures and poems describe cats of different types and colours and are copies of other and older pictures, which date from throughout the Ayutthaya period of Thai history (1350 - 1767), and show that the Thai cats as we know them now have changed little if at all in all their recorded history - some 600 years or more.

Wichianmaad? The Siamese.

Thong Daeng? The Thai Copper: surely the forerunner of the Brown Burmese and still bred in Thailand today.

And Doklao? One of the Thai names for the cat we call Korat.

This is how the Korat is described in the Manuscript:

"The cat Mal-Ed has a body colour like "Doklao"
"The hairs are smooth, with roots like clouds and tips like silver
The eyes shine like dewdrops on a lotus leaf"

'Maled' means seed. 'Dok' means flower, and 'lao' can be translated as 'lemon-grass', 'pampas grass', or 'reed blossom'. All of these are silvery and silky smooth, so are applicable to the Korat coat.

Nowadays in Thailand, the Korats are generally referred to as the “Si-Sawat” cats and are found in many places, not only in the north-east part of the country. “Si” means colour. “Sawat” has several meanings, including good fortune or prosperity. 'Si-Sawat' is also a compound Thai word meaning a mingled colour of grey and light green.

According to the unknown author of the Smud Khoi, 17 of these cats are bringers of good luck, and 6 of bad. The Korat, with its rain-cloud coat and green eyes, is one of the luckiest, a symbol of wealth, fertility and good harvests. It used to be tradition for a newly married couple to be presented with a Korat on their wedding day, and in remote villages in the north east of Thailand a Korat is still paraded around, and carried in procession to the well where it is sprinkled with water, to ensure the rice paddies are filled by rain. Thai people also put a Korat cat in the same bed of a newborn child to protect the baby's sleep and as a sign of prosperity for the future.

As the good-luck cat of Thailand, the Korat has long been cherished by the Thai people and originally could only be given as a gift to someone who was deemed worthy of such a valued present. And such a valued possession was not given lightly. Korats have been given as gift for many years only to important people, diplomats and even kings and queens.

The Korat's origin could be in the remote province of Korat, a place of huge granite outcrops, where its coat would blend in with its surroundings. It is said that their colouring protected them, among the granite areas of Pimai District, from extinction in the constant wars that raged between Siam and her neighbours. Its ancestor is a jungle cat that still lives in remote areas of Thailand. While living free, the cats have chosen their own partners. Following the laws of nature, that means that only the best and strongest cats survive and reproduce.

It's said that King Rama V named the breed for this geographical location earlier this century. However, they are still rare and remain the most highly prized cat of the Thai people, who do not think of the Siamese as their national cat, as we might naturally think, but the Korat.

It wasn't until the 1960s that Korat breeding began in the west when a pair was sent from a friend in Bangkok to Mrs Jean Johnson of Cedar Glen cattery, in the USA. This brother and sister, **Nara** and **Darra**, will always be remembered in any Korat history as the first outside Thailand.

There is though an intriguing reference, over fifty years earlier, to a “blue cat from Siam” in Britain in 1896. (May 1896, Nam Noi, male Siamese (parents not listed), imported January 1895, owned by Mrs B Spearman – and he was all blue...). It was exhibited as a Siamese cat, but had the ignominy of being disqualified by one of the most famous early cat fancier judges, artist Louis Wain. The reason given was that its colouring was not the accepted biscuit fawn.

Throughout the 1960s, more cats were acquired from Thailand by the growing circle of Korat fanciers in the United States. Mrs. Daphne Negus of Si-Sawat cattery, an important pioneer in the breed, journeyed to Thailand to import nine Korats as this number is believed by the Thai people to bring good luck. In 1965 the American Korat Cat Fanciers Association (KCFA) was established to protect and develop the breed, as well as to preserve its heritage. A standard was written based on the appearance of the original native cats, and the Korats were accepted by the Cat Fanciers Association (CFA) in 1966.

The recognition of the breed in FIFe took much longer. Although the first Korat was firstly imported in 1974, recognition arrived in 1981 and championship status in 1983. Today Korats are recognized by all cat associations around the World.

Korat breeders outside of Thailand are very careful to maintain the breed's link with its motherland. All Korats, by definition, are based on lines that terminate at an import from Thailand, as the breed is young and no out-crossing to other breeds is allowed. For this reason the Korat can be considered one of the purest breeds in existence today. And they are blue, all blue and only blue, from birth to death. Any other colour makes it a different breed and not a Korat.

3. THE BREED STANDARD

The body of the Korat is of medium size, semy-cobby in structure, powerful and muscular, but still elegant and with graceful lines. You'd be surprised to find out how heavy it is! And not only males that are usually larger, but also the females! It is pure stone with muscles in clear evidence thanks also to the short coat and a peculiar silver halo that exalts this feature quite a lot. It's an excellent climber, jumper and can reach very high places so easily! This because the hind legs are bit longer than the front legs and notably more muscled. And its perfect balance allow it to walk normally everywhere, even when the surface is very limited... It will be normal to see a Korat walking, or even sleeping on a door's edge.

The coat of a Korat is also quite an interesting feature of the breed. Very short, lying on the body, with a minimum or no undercoat at all. The texture is fine and silky and when you touch it you feel every single muscle of the cat. The coat colour is medium blue (grey) on the whole body. But each hair shows three shades of blue: lighter at the roots, darker in the middle and ending with an almost white tip that gives the cat a silver halo effect on all body and especially where the coat is shorter (legs, ears...). The tip of the hair, in fact, has no melanin, thus the special effect. On the back the coat can be just a bit longer so that, when the cat moves, the coat breaks over the spine.

And the head... It is described as "heart shaped" but there is more than one heart in the Korat... The Korat is, in fact, the 5 hearts cat... wonder why?

The first heart is the one that you can see looking at its face from the front. The eye brows form the upper part of the heart, then the side lines come down to the chin to complete the shape.

The second heart is the one you can see formed by the whole head, ears included. In this case, it's the ears that form the upper part of the heart shape.

The third one you can see looking to the head from above. There is a slight line, an indentation, on top of the head and in the middle of the skull that joins the base of the ears from the back. That is the upper part of the third heart shape.

Than there is the fourth heart that you can see from the back of the cat. That same line mentioned above in the middle of the head can be clearly seen also from the back and the shape of the head forms an evident heart with the tip that ends between the shoulders.

And then, there is the last one. The most important which resides inside the Korat's chest and that always beats for you...

The profile is of medium length and shows a slight stop between the forehead and the nose and, bit below, the nose leather makes a downward curve that is also described as

“lion like” curve. The top of head is flat and shows an indentation, more visible in males, that is the base for all the head shapes described above.

But when you look at a Korat cat for the first time, you get really amazed by the size, shape and sight of its eyes. They are huge, round and well open and have a special sight that reveals how clever this cat is. Oversized compared to the size of the face, they are always attentive, alert, curious, inquisitive. Those eyes, of a luminous peridot green, are really captivating and enchanting. It’s impossible to remain untouched by the density of those “lights”.

4. BREEDING KORATS

Breeding Korats is relatively easy. The females are generally excellent mothers and may give birth to medium to large litters. The larger litter ever recorded was born in an American cattery (Kal Lee) from an Italian queen (EC. Jadeye Arrogance) that gave birth to 10 little blue kittens of which “only” seven survived.

Females are good at giving birth too. They won’t need any help but just some moral support from its human that, in those very special moments, is not allowed to go anywhere! and for any reason in the world! So, be prepared to sit for as long as needed and don’t forget your food, your water and all you may need... If you move from there, the Korat mom will stop the process and follow you for sure! They would possibly give birth on your lap, completely ignoring the wonderful and well equipped box you have prepared for them just 10-20 cm further. Your laps are just more comfortable, that’s it.

Males are also very good “at giving birth”... no, it’s not a joke. 😊

Very often males help out with the new born kittens in a way that is unbelievable! More than once my boys, that are always present during the birth, decided to step in and give some help, cleaning the little ones, cutting the umbilical cords, sitting nearby to be sure that everything was going on normally. When mom goes out to eat or drink, dad comes in (if not yet there), and cuddle the babies, licks the little bodies and help them with the normal, necessary functions. And this goes on for many weeks and for some months.

Korat males are really something special, indeed!

The most problematic aspect of breeding Korats is that these cats can be very much sex crazy!

Both males and females mature quite early – usually around 4-5 months of age and start “expressing their needs” in a way that is embarrassing, to say the less.

Female screams like hell (and can spray a lot too) for many days and weeks and, in some cases, until they are mated. Males spray hard and keep doing it under any circumstances. They can sire litters at 5 months! There are a few exception to the spraying habit, of course, but it is always advised to neuter/spay a Korat if there is not intention to breed out if it.

Korats can’t be caged. This is very important. They would die otherwise. They want to be free to go anywhere they like and for as long as they like. You maybe can keep them confined in large rooms, never alone, and separate them from places you want to keep for yourself, but they need a lot of room and jumping places to live healthy and comfortably. And, above all, they need their humans for their games, tricks and... cuddles. And cages are definitely not the right system to keep Korats.

BREEDING SURPRISES

Korats are also known for carrying a couple of recessive colours. Due to the fact that, originally, they were bred and **named** by the Thai people according to the colour, they inherited the other patterns that were, and still are, common in Thailand: The point gene and the chocolate gene.

Occasionally, when two carriers of one of these genes mate, blue point kittens or lilac kittens are born. They are not recognized by FIFe nor by other associations but have been granted recognition in GCCF with different breed names: Thai Blue Points and Thai Lilacs. Obviously, not all Korats carry the recessive colour genes. And, in addition, there is now a genetic DNA test available to breeders to identify possible carriers. Therefore breeding Korats is now much easier than it was in the past thanks to the help of medical and genetic researches. At least everybody is now allowed to make a choice based on reliable test results and breed accordingly.

As a matter of fact, a Korat is a blue cat from birth to death and this is another reason why Korat breeders cooperate so much. Protecting the “blue breed from Thailand” is the most important goal for us.

5. THE KORAT TEMPERAMENT

It is really very difficult to explain in short what makes this breed so special and different from others when it comes to the temperament. Most breeders and owners actually decided to start breeding them or to adopt them after getting captivated mostly by this very special, strong, unusual character, more than by the external look of the cat.

Keeping in mind that the males are bit more “easy going” when it comes to the temperament and sweeter to some extent, what is described below is the typical female temperament. Generally speaking, I’d say a female Korat really expresses better the many special traits of the Korat temperament, more than a male.

A Korat is a lively and extroverted cat that demands close contact with its human to thrive. The true Korat temperament is a *mild cat with a will of iron!* A Korat is not afraid of anything – it is convinced that it may do anything it has not previously been told not to, adapts quite easily to new situations, has its own opinion about the people who come to the house and definitely behaves like the boss in any situation (with both other animals and humans, of course).

It is not necessarily the easiest cat to live with, as it has a great degree of self-confidence and expects you to adapt your habits to its needs and ideas... But, if you are ready to accept a few compromises in your everyday life and ready to give the Korat the attention and love it demands - when it wants it - you will have a very loyal and true friend for life.

A cat that will follow you in “everything” that you do - a cat that will sleep with you - it may even go into the shower with you!

Good to know, if you are thinking of living with one (or more) Korat(s):

- if you are away many hours a day, it is advisable to have two cats, so they have each others' company. They don't have to be two Korats - Korats get along well with other breeds unless they win the top of hierarchy, of course.

- One must be prepared to spend time with the Korat when coming home from work for example. Another cat as company doesn't substitute human contact, which the Korat doesn't thrive well without.
- It is close to you whatever you do, so remember to get it out of the closet before closing the door..., also be careful that it doesn't run out the door while you are on your way in or out or jumps out the open window...
- It has its very own view of how the world works – and is convinced that the Korat is the centre of it! Everything is about the Korat - or it will be! :-))) One is very seldom in doubt as to when a Korat wants something... it is not always clear what it wants, but it is easily understood that it wants something!
- Be prepared that the Korat uses its voice often and loudly (especially if it doesn't get what it wants!). How much it uses its voice for everyday communication is very individual, but if it feels neglected or bored, then it can lift its voices to unbelievable levels!

In spite of the strong will of the Korat, it can quite easily be trained with respect and firmness. If the Korat from the very beginning learns that "no" means "no" (and not "maybe") and this is used consistently it will learn what is allowed and not allowed quite fast. That does not mean it won't try the limits once in a while... isn't that part of being a cat? As said before, the Korat has a will of iron - that says it all, doesn't it?

6. THE HEALTH

Korats are strong, not only in muscles and temper but also in health.

Being a natural cat, never crossed to any other breed for centuries, it keeps the genetic strength of the wild cats almost untouched. There is maybe only one weak point that is to be mentioned and that is, basically, caused by the development of the breed at different latitudes than their motherland, where the weather is of a certain kind (warm and humid) and the sun shines most of the times during the year. Korats may suffer, from time to time, from upper respiratory problems due to sudden change of weather. We must be very careful with opening windows or when leaving a little bit of air coming inside where they usually sleep or live. Especially in Winter time.

But apart from this, no specific illnesses have been ever noticed that would be considered typical to the breed.

On the other hand, the Korat breed have suffered in the past from a terrible genetic disease called Gangliosidosis (GM). It's recessive, and pops up only when two carriers mate. It's a degenerative disease that affects the central nervous system. The enzyme responsible to metabolize the fat doesn't work properly and the fat accumulates in the brain causing malfunctions at neurological level.

And it's lethal. There is no chance for the little one to survive even if it can live up to 2 years of age at the latest. There are two known types of Gangliosidosis. The first one, GM1, is more recent and just discovered bit less than 10 years ago. The other one, GM2, was well known already in the 70s but wasn't given the necessary attention at the time, mostly because of the lack of knowledge and understanding of the problem.

But thanks to the recent intensive cooperation among Korat breeders from all over the world, private economical support provided, and the determination in finding the solution for this terrible problem, the Korat breed is now free from the risk of being affected again by the GM. In 1998 a DNA test was developed to identify all possible carriers and a selective breeding activity started to avoid the birth of more affected kittens and limit the

birth of carriers. The testing program has been very successful and we can finally say that the GM problem in Korats is over, in all countries.

Korat breeders are very proud of the success obtained and can certainly claim to be the first in the cat fancy to achieve such a result with a DNA test just for this specific disease.

7. THE IDEAL OWNER

Even if this may sound discouraging, I must say the Korat is not a cat that can be adopted by everybody. A Korat can adapt to all living situations, that's true, but develops a special strong bond with the owner and if s/he won't understand the needs and the special temper of the cat, living with it won't be easy for both.

Korats, as I said, are dominant and strong willed. They tend to put everybody, humans and other animals, under their firm paws and to boss all creatures they live with. A little despot in a way, that needs a firm hand to grow up as a well behaved and balanced cat.

The ideal owner should be able to have an honest relationship that must be at the same level, made of reciprocal respect and trust. This is the only way to make it show its best quality in terms of sweetness and devotion. Living it alone for too long is not advisable. It is better to bring it with you, instead. Korats don't have problems with travelling long distances either by car or by plane. They would come with you wherever, as the most important thing for them is to keep in direct and constant contact with the owner, as much as possible. In addition, Korats get bored quite easily. If they are left alone for too long, they may find a way (not necessary "our way") to spend their time at home... It may not be a pleasant surprise.

The ideal owner should be available for playing with them a lot too. They play fetch, like dogs, and enjoy this game so much that you'd get exhausted while your Korat would still come back with the "mouse" in its mouth asking for more runs! They love to run, they love to jump, they love to "live". Yes, they are incredibly lively, even when they get bit older. They behave like kittens all the time, especially when they play, and seem to have a never ending energy, for talking, playing, eating and... purring (but only when they decide to!). Therefore, the ideal owner must be prepared to follow it carefully, especially when it's young, and to get ready to some extra work every single day of their life together.

Korats are really captivating and fascinating creatures. And if the relationship is successful, you won't want to have any other cat but a Korat...

8. KORATS AND CAT SHOWS

Korat are still quite a rare breed and it is not very easy to find them at all cat shows. They are, anyway, bred in many European Countries, in North and South America, Canada and in Australia.

They are, generally, easy to handle at shows. Very seldom a Korat is afraid of being handled by other humans or by a judge, but there may be exceptions, of course.

The fact is that, basically, they get very much bored inside their show cages and once they are out for judging they take the opportunity to express their disappointment for the long wait... they are very vocal and sometimes they scream like crazy for no reason whatsoever, or at least no reason from our point of view... What is interesting to notice is that no other cat cares about their show "performances" or are afraid of them, basically because there is not aggressive intentions in them. It's just complaint.

They don't like to be handled too much anyway, and prefer to have their feet firmly on the table. Kittens play like crazy under any circumstances and cat shows are really not a

problem for them. On the contrary, judges may have problems with their jumping everywhere following a feather or anything that moves nearby.

Generally Korats are not easily recognized by the public and it is bit difficult for “non experts” to keep them apart from other blue breeds (Russian Blue, Chartreux,...) and Burmese too.

What would help the public to easily identify them is definitely the shape, size and colour of the Korat eyes. No other breed has such large, round, luminous green eyes! Also, they are bit smaller compared to the mentioned breeds... But the feature that would help anyone to identify a Korat immediately is the voice!

Korats have been showed for many years now, in all cat associations around the world and quite successfully. The most successful Korat ever in FIFe has been a female neuter born in Denmark that achieved the highest title of *FIFe of World Winner* twice in 1999 and 2000. Primprau's Meo Hao, a female neuter Korat of 13 years now, is a “flag” for Korat breeders in FIFe as she has been the only Korat to achieve such a result since the recognition of the breed in FIFe.

9. REFERENCES

This article has been written also thanks to the support of devoted Korat breeders that, during the years, have been a referring point for all those interested in the breed.

Many other info can be also found on **Koratworld** website: <http://www.koratworld.com> which is the largest and the most comprehensive website devoted to this breed.

Thanks for all their help and contributions to the following Korat “slaves”:

- Mrs. Daphne Negus, Si-Sawat Cattery, USA
- Mrs. Jen Lacey, Jenanca Cattery, UK
- Mrs. Camilla Baird, Primpraus Cattery, Denmark
- Mrs. Elfi Kleive, Pimai Cattery, Norway
- Mrs. Elaine Vincent, Ratchasima Cattery, Australia
- Mrs. Eva Krinda, Doklao Cattery, Australia

For references and information about the Gangliosidosis, thanks to Dr. Henry Baker, from Alabama, USA and to Dr. Massimo Castagnaro, from Padova, IT, the two scientists that developed the DNA test now freely available to all Korat breeders

All info about GM in Korats can be found at: <http://www.koratworld.com/gm.html>

For further info about Korats in FIFe, please visit the **FIFe Korat Breed Council** website at: <http://www.fifekoratbc.com> or write to the BC's Secretary at: secretary@fifekoratbc.com

That's all folks!

Donatella Mastrangelo - Italy
JADEYE - Korats “slave” since 1993