

October 2005

Volume VIII

The ACFA Breed Section votes on ...

SIBERIAN AS A NEW OUTCROSS?

The ACFA Breed Executive Committee has asked that the Siberian be added to the allowable outcrosses for the RagaMuffin. The ACFA Board of Directors approved the request and it is now being put to a vote on the current ACFA ballot. All eligible breeders are encouraged to cast your vote on this important issue. Below is an edited version (due to length) of a presentation prepared for the ACFA Board Meeting in August by Janet Klarmann. It sets forth the reasons behind the request. The complete version will be uploaded to the Files of the Members of RAG list website.

Should the Siberian become an allowable RagaMuffin outcross?

To answer this question, we will examine the following more detailed questions:

Why does the RagaMuffin need outcrosses at all?

Why are the current outcrosses, Persian, Himalayan, and Ragdoll, insufficient?

Is the Siberian a desirable outcross for the RagaMuffin?

Discussion of Question One: Why does the RagaMuffin need outcrosses at all?

Our gene pool was so limited from the beginning that we must still carefully introduce just the right outcrosses to prevent severe inbreeding. Here is why this is so:

The RagaMuffin resulted when a group of breeders broke away from the International Ragdoll Cat Association (IRCA) in 1994. While associated with IRCA, these breeders were not given pedigree information on their cats until late 1993, when the founder announced that she was going to retire and turned over her pedigree records to the group that was to take over the organization. Before that time, the founder had dictated the pairings for all IRCA breeding programs.

When the founder rescinded her planned retirement, the group decided to break ties with IRCA and petitioned ACFA for recognition. At that time, we began to study our pedigrees and were astounded to find that we had a very limited gene pool. We soon realized that we had a severely inbred community of cats and asked ACFA to allow us to outcross to the Himalayan, Persian, Ragdoll and Long Haired Domestic. Permission was granted.

When we applied for Championship status in 2000, we were asked to discontinue breeding to the LHD in 2001 and to discontinue breeding to the Ragdoll in 2010. We agreed. At that time, we were still a small group of breeders...only about 20.



Cooncreole Merzhvezdnoje Murlykane
Siberian Alter



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We worked together to develop and promote our breed.

Since many of our cats had roundness to the skull that was not evident in the Ragdoll of that time, we calculated that breeding to a Persian or Himalayan every fifth generation would preserve that roundness but would not substantially impact the look of the RagaMuffin.

All of this has been good; however, with the sudden influx of new breeders in the last few years it is becoming more and more difficult to find an appropriate breeding pair. Our pedigrees are “crossing” over and over and showing the same cats within only a few generations. To prevent returning to a severely inbred situation, we do need to outcross.

Discussion of Question Two: Why are the current outcrosses, Persian/Himalayan and Ragdoll, insufficient?

The Persian/Himalayan outcross provides necessary genes and desired characteristics when used appropriately and sparingly; however, it is not sufficient because more than a little use of this outcross produces kittens and cats that do not conform to the RagaMuffin Standard.



Almaz Gandalf Galadriel
Siberian male



Twofold Maksimillian
of Jasper Ridge - Siberian male

The Ragdoll outcross provides some additional genes and can help to modify the Persian/Himalayan characteristics. However, the Ragdoll and the RagaMuffin are descended from the same original gene pool. Because of this some Ragdoll lines contribute redundant genes to a gene pool that is already quite small.

Recently, there has been a huge influx of new breeders. Our small group has grown from a handful of about 20 to closer to 100. Suddenly, breeders are finding it difficult to find cats that are not closely related. There is no fresh blood. Our original plan was to grow slowly, developing new lines from our outcrossed lines. We are unprepared for growth such as is being currently experienced.

Because of this, many breeders are now turning to the Persian/Himalayan to bring in fresh genes. Previously, the Persian/Himalayan outcrosses were carefully chosen by a few people who were familiar with those breeds. In nearly every case, the Persian/Himalayan was a female, so only a limited number of first generation kittens entered the gene pool. Those who bred the outcrosses were devoted to finding breeding berths for the best of the offspring, as that is the job of an outcross, to bring new genes into the gene pool. Outcrossing is not done for the purpose of producing cute, half-breed pets.

In contrast, many of the new breeders are choosing studs for outcrossing, so most of the offspring from their catteries will be first generation outcrosses with a Persian parent. As more breeders are seeking a “fix” for the limited gene pool, they are producing cats that are as cute as they can be; however, they have the characteristics of pet quality Persians rather than those of RagaMuffins.

The Persian/Himalayan outcross, when overused, defeats our

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ability to maintain the structure of the RagaMuffin as defined in our Standard of Perfection.

So, how about the Ragdoll? The Ragdolls and the RagaMuffins, although they have developed into two distinctly different breeds, have a fair amount of overlap in their pedigrees if you look below the surface. Even though some of the IRCA Ragdolls that were registered in TICA have slightly different names than they do in ACFA, they are the same cats and appear in both Ragdoll and RagaMuffin pedigrees. We have outcrossed already to some of the more distantly related Ragdoll lines, but now we must be very careful to avoid matches that are too closely related.

Discussion of Question Three: Is the Siberian a desirable outcross for the RagaMuffin?

The Siberian is desirable as a RagaMuffin outcross because it provides a balance to the Persian/Himalayan qualities that do not match our standard while at the same time adding to the robust health of the RagaMuffin because they come from a completely unrelated gene pool.

Because the Siberian is a “natural” breed that is relatively new to selective breeding, they possess some diversity insofar as type. Given their compatible characteristics, we could choose Siberian outcrosses to compliment the RagaMuffin, producing better type, while at the same time not compromising key RagaMuffin attributes nor encompassing a Siberian look. What Siberians can provide is a balance to the Persian influence and a boost to our limited gene pool.

This balance is the reason that we are looking to the Siberian as an alternative outcross. Do we plan to breed to them on a wholesale scale? We do not. We will recommend that our breeders breed to a Siberian no more than once in five generations.

In order to test whether the two breeds would produce a cat with the desired characteristics, we bred a test litter. Two of those kittens have been shown in ACFA in the Household Pet Class for the past few months. They are a delight. The test was successful in our eyes. We have asked many of the judges for their opinions and, to my knowledge, all have responded favorably to the combination.

We believe that the Siberian is a desirable outcross for the RagaMuffin, It adds much needed genetic diversity while simultaneously encouraging the eye, head, body, and tail characteristics called for by the RagaMuffin standard.

Comparison of Breed Standards		
Siberian	RagaMuffin	Persian
Head: Modified wedge of medium to medium-large size, in proportion to the body, with rounded contours, broader at the skull, narrowing slightly to a full slightly rounded but moderately short muzzle, noticeable whisker pads with a well-rounded chin.	Head: A broad modified wedge, with a rounded appearance. Forehead should be moderately rounded. Muzzle is round, slightly shorter than moderate in length, tending to broadness.	Head: Massive with great breadth of skull; round underlying bone structure. Nose short, snub and broad with a decided nose break between the eyes.
Profile: In profile the nose has a gentle concave curve through the eye region between nose and brow.	Profile: In profile, there is an obvious nose dip, giving the impression of a scoop rather than a break.	Profile: In profile, the forehead, nose and chin should appear to form a perpendicular line.
Ears: Medium, wide at the base and set as much on the sides of the head as on the top	Ears: Medium in size, set to the side of the head with slight flaring, tilted slightly forward, rounded (lynx point should have tufts on the tips of the ears), with moderate furnishings, in pleasing proportion to the head. Should be set as much on the side of the head as on top of the head.	Ears: Small, rounded tipped, set wide apart and not unduly open at the base.

Comparison of Breed Standards *(continued)*

Siberian	RagaMuffin	Persian
Eyes: Moderately large, rounded, wide set. If not held fully open the eye will appear to have the outer corner slightly angled toward the lower base of the ear.	Eyes: Large, walnut shaped and expressive, moderately wide set, the eyes contribute to the characteristic sweet look. A slight oriental tip to the eye is acceptable.	Eyes: Eye opening should be large and round, set wide apart giving a sweet expression to the face.
Legs & Paws: Fur on the front legs thick, short to medium in length. Fur on hind legs medium to long, thick and feather like. Legs are thick and dense and medium in length. The feet are big and round and toe tufts are desirable.	Legs & Paws: Heavily boned, medium in length with the back legs slightly longer than the front legs, yet in proportion to the body. Paws should be large and round, able to support the weight of the cat without splaying, and with tufts beneath and between the paws.	Legs & Paws: Short, thick and heavily boned, having a height at the shoulders and rump about equal to the length of the back.



Take the quiz ...

Can You Identify the RagaMuffin – Siberian Cross?

Below are nine pictures of kittens. See if you can identify which kittens are pure RagaMuffins and which are RagaMuffin-Siberian crosses ... or anything else! Answers are after the President's Message on page 6. No cheating!





From the President's Corner

Dear RAG Members,

In our continuing efforts to make our web page, www.ragamuffingroup.com interesting and helpful, there have been some changes and additions. If you haven't visited the website recently, please go and feast your eyes!

"See Our Beautiful RagaMuffins" now links to the "RagaMuffin Gallery"... In the RagaMuffin Gallery is a representative of each RAG cattery. So far, 13 of our catteries

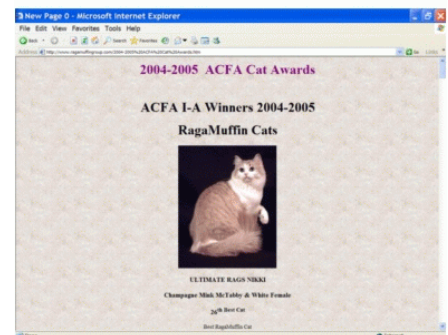
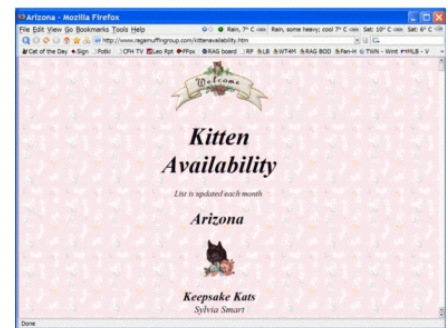
are represented. It is our desire to have an exhibition from each cattery so ... if you have not yet submitted yours, please send a photo along with the cat's full ACFA registered name, parents names, color, and sex to muffinmama828@earthlink.net. What better way to show off our beautiful babies and a variety of colors and patterns while showcasing each cattery? We will allow changes quarterly.

We have added a new page to the website, "Kitten Availability". This page will be updated each month by Tom Piazza. If you have kittens, adults, retired breeders, rescues, or litters due, you may send that information to Tom and he will list them on the page. Tom will be requesting info at the beginning of the month. If he has not heard from you during that first week, it will be noted that your cattery has not submitted information for that particular month. Be sure to get your information to him quickly, as once the first week has passed, the opportunity to update will not be available until the following month.

Other new pages celebrate the lovely RagaMuffins who received either national or regional recognition in ACFA during the 2004-2005 show year.

We'd like to thank John Hunt for submitting the idea for the "RagaMuffin Gallery". If you have an idea for an addition or improvement for the web page, please let us know! Tom Piazza is working to increase our visibility to the search engines. We'd like to have a "reason" for people to return again and again, once they find us!

On the association front... There has been quite a bit of activity. The ACFA and TICA Annuals were in August and RagaMuffin issues were presented at both. I attended the ACFA Annual and presented our request to allow the Siberian as an outcross. I am pleased to say that our proposal was approved by the BOD with only two dissenting votes. The proposal will now appear on the ballot to be distributed in the ACFA Bulletin. If you are a full voting member of the Breed Section, be certain to send your vote to ACFA so that all opinions may be heard.



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Tom Piazza was our representative at the TICA Annual and spoke in support of advancing the RagaMuffin to Preliminary New Breed Status. Unfortunately, the BOD meeting was running late and realizing that there was likely to be a considerable amount of discussion, the proposal was tabled until the Semi-Annual Meeting next February in Long Island, NY. I believe that Tom will provide a more detailed report of the meeting in a separate report.

There are consistent appearances in CFA and apparently many of the judges are leaning towards recommending the breed for advancement to Provisional.

We'd like to welcome new RAG Members Doug and Mika Day, Gig Harbor, WA; Terri Harley, Temecula, CA; Laurie Hale, Benton City, WA; Gary Lewis, East Branch, NY; Brandy Hartman, Ft. Worth, TX; Mona Robinson, Ripon, CA; and, Sonja Williams, Kaufman, TX. It's nice to have you all aboard!

I'd especially like to thank our diligent RAG Secretary, Sr. Stephanie, for our beautiful RAG Directory and calendar. She only outdoes herself year after year! However, I doubt that she'll ever be able to top this year's! Kudos galore!

The New Breeder Application Packet has been completed and the first applications have been mailed to prospective breeders. It is our desire to maintain a high standard for RAG breeders. We want those who are seriously considering the purchase of a RagaMuffin to have confidence that buying from a RAG Breeder is buying from a qualified, committed breeder. By pre-qualifying our breeders we are starting the process of attracting only those who have the potential to become top-notch, qualified breeders. You can access the NBAP through the Members of RAG Website ... Files Section. Many thanks to Sylvia Bindel who spent many hours agonizing over the contents and questions. It's a great package! I'd also like to thank the others who contributed their ideas and suggestions for the packet.

We will be having an election this December for President and Vice President. Please consider volunteering to either run for office or serving on the Nomination Committee. We need three people for the Nominating Committee right away as the committee must be in place by mid-October. Please contact me if you'd be willing to serve on the committee. If you are interested in running for office, please consult Article V, Section 3 of the RAG Constitution & Bylaws for qualifications and, if qualified, notify Sr. Stephanie that you'd like to become a candidate.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have impacted the lives of several of our members and we continually send our love and prayers to them.

We've had a very interesting and rewarding Third Quarter. Thank you all for your efforts to make RAG an organization in which it's members can take pride.

Purrrs,

Janet Klarmann, President
RagaMuffin Associated Group

Answers to the RagaMuffin – Siberian Quiz

1. First generation Persian Outcross; 2. First Generation Siberian Outcross; 3. RagaMuffin; 4. Full RagaMuffin litter from the same mother as produced the first generation Siberian litter; 5. RagaMuffin; 6. Brown Tabby is RagaMuffin the other two are first generation Siberians; 7. First Generation Siberian Outcross; 8. First Generation Siberian Outcross; 9. First Generation Siberian Outcross