

The Birman



Overview

The Birman cat breed, also known as the Sacred Cat of Burma, is a medium to large, semi-longhaired, ivory-colored cat with darker color points on the ears, face, legs and tail and an overall golden sheen. Among its most distinctive features are pure white paws on all four feet called “gloves,” which preferably are symmetrical. Birmans also have white, v-shaped areas on the hind legs that come to a point on the back of the hock; these are called “laces.” The Birman’s silky coat is less prone to matting than that of the Persian or Himalayan, although it does require more attention than the coat of a short-haired cat. Birmans come in a number of different colors. Kittens are born almost entirely white. They develop their darker points of whatever color over time. Birmans have round, deep blue eyes set widely above high cheekbones and a slightly Roman-shaped nose. This gives them an especially sweet facial expression.

Birmans have great dispositions. They are friendly, self-assured, extremely inquisitive and playfully outgoing, without being overly pushy. They are known to follow their owners around the house like puppies. Birmans need and appreciate human companionship, and are especially fond of children. This is a happy, trusting and adaptable breed.

Origin

It is believed that the Birman originated in the Temple of Lao-Tsun in Asia for the worship of the goddess Tsun-Kyan-Kse. She was a golden goddess with sapphire blue eyes. Mun-Ha, one of the priests of the temple, would kneel before the statue of the goddess with the white temple cat named Sinh sitting beside him. One night, raiders came into the temple as Mun-Ha was worshipping and killed him. As Mun-Ha was dying, Sinh put his feet on Mun-Ha and faced



the goddess. His body immediately turned from white to gold, and his eyes turned blue, just like those of the goddess. His legs turned brown, but where his feet touched his master, they remained white as a symbol of purity. All the other



cats in and around the temple also changed in this way. Sinh stayed with his master for the next seven days when he too died, and Sinh carried the soul of Mun-Ha to paradise. To this day, it is believed that whenever one of the sacred temple cats dies, the soul of a priest accompanies the soul of the cat to paradise.

When the temple was raided again in 1919, Auguste Pavie and Major Gordon Russell helped the temple priests. As a gesture of thanks, the priests gave these men a breeding pair of Birmans, which were the foundation of the breed in the west. Both men were then living in France. The Birmans did very well for a while but by the end of the Second World War, only one pair of Birmans was left. Once again, hard work had to happen to keep this breed alive.

In the 1960s, the first Birmans were imported into Britain. Kittens from these breeding programs were exported to other countries all over the world. In 1966, the Birman was recognized in Britain and in 1967, the Birman became a recognized breed in the United States. In Europe, the breed goes by its traditional name, the Sacred Cat of Burma.

Temperament

The Birman is a great family cat that can be in a single cat household or in a multi cat household. They are typically a very laid back cat that is calm, affectionate and seeks out the attention of people. They tend to get along well with kids, dogs and other cats. They love to chase and play. Unlike other cats, Birmans prefer to be around other animals.

Traits

Weight ranges: males and females greater than 12 pounds

Life expectancy: 9 to 13 years

Eye Color: Blue

Coat:

Length: Semi long to long

Texture: Silky

Pattern: Points, Mitted

The Birman has a silky, medium-length coat with a pointed pattern (meaning that the color is darker on the face, ears, legs and tail), a broad, rounded head topped with medium-size ears, bright blue eyes that give him a sweet expression, and four



white feet. This is a medium-size to large cat with a stocky, powerful body that belies his gentle demeanor.

The medium-long to long coat has a silky texture and little undercoat, which means that it rarely mats. It forms a heavy ruff around the neck and is wavy on the belly. Pale body fur color, which varies in shade depending on the cat's color, is set off by darker points. For instance, a seal point Birman has a body that is a pale fawn to cream color with a warm tone, gradually shading to a lighter color on the belly and chest. The points are a deep seal brown. On the front and back paws are white "gloves" ending in an even line across the paw. On the back paws, the gloves extend up the back of the leg (called laces) and end in a point or an inverted V shape



Besides seal point, Birmans come in blue point, chocolate point, lilac point, and various parti-color point and lynx point colors. Lynx point Birmans have a clearly defined M marking on the forehead, light markings that resemble eyeglasses around the eyes, spotted whisker pads, solid-colored ears with no stripes, and "thumb marks" on the back of the ears. The legs and tail have stripes and rings.

Health

They are generally healthy cats that have a long life expectancy. However, as with any breed, health problems can occur. These include:

- Congenital hypotrichosis, which causes them to be born with no hair, and thymic aplasia, an immune deficiency that leads to increased risk of infection and death. Fortunately, these conditions are rare.
- Corneal dermoid, the presence of skin and hair on the surface of the cornea (the clear front of the eye) of one or both eyes. It can be corrected surgically.
- Spongiform degeneration, a progressive degenerative disease of the central nervous system causing signs that include hind-limb weakness and uncoordinated movement.
- Shaking and trembling in kittens. This condition begins in some kittens when they are about 10 days old and lasts until they are about 12 weeks old. The cause is unknown and recovery occurs spontaneously.
- Unusually high concentrations of urea and/or creatinine in the blood, which may or may not indicate kidney dysfunction.

Grooming and Care

Despite the length of the Birman's coat, it has a silky texture that doesn't mat easily. Comb it weekly to remove dead hair and distribute skin oils. Birmans shed their winter coat in the spring, so you may want to comb more frequently then to remove loose hair. A warm bath can also help to loosen and remove the shedding coat.

Brush the teeth to prevent periodontal disease. Daily dental hygiene is best, but weekly brushing is better than nothing. Trim the nails every couple of weeks. Wipe the corners of the eyes with a soft, damp cloth to remove any discharge. Use a



separate area of the cloth for each eye so you don't risk of spreading any infection. Check the ears weekly. If they look dirty, wipe them out with a cotton ball or soft damp cloth moistened with warm water.

Keep their litter box spotlessly clean. Cats are very particular about bathroom hygiene, and a clean litter box will help to keep the coat clean as well.

It's a good idea to keep a Birman as an indoor-only cat to protect him from diseases spread by other cats, attacks, and the other dangers that face cats that go outdoors. Birmans who go outdoors also run the risk of being stolen by someone who would like to have such a beautiful cat without paying for it.

