

THE JAPANESE BOBTAIL

A Brief History of CFA's New Provisional Breed

Elizabeth S. Freret



Mrs. Elizabeth Freret

My introduction to the fascinating short-tailed cats of Japan occurred four years ago during a visit to the Shoreham Pet Shop in Bethesda, Maryland. Bernice Cool, the proprietor and a well-known cat breeder, showed me a handsome red tabby spay whom she was boarding for a service family just returned from Japan. We speculated whether the cat had been born with her short fluffy tail (much like a rabbit's tail) or had lost the rest of it through an accident. About a month later, at the 1967 Madison Square Garden cat show, Bob Winn introduced me to Bess Higuchi, a Siamese breeder and CFA judge in Japan. Mrs. Higuchi was visiting her daughter and son-in-law here and had scheduled her trip to include several cat shows across the country. I asked her about the handsome, short-tailed cat from Japan which I'd seen at the pet shop and she assured me that a number of the street cats in Japan had similar short tails. She also mentioned that the calico cats in Japan were usually more vividly colored and dramatically marked than any she'd seen in this country. Intrigued by the possible combination, I asked if she would consider exchanging an Abyssinian female for a pair of short-tailed Japanese cats — a calico (or "mi-ke," meaning tri-colored) and a male suitable in coloring for breeding calico kittens. She agreed; but indicated that it might take some time to find such a pair since the Japanese were not sufficiently impressed with their indigenous cats to breed them as such, and that animal rescue leagues were not in existence in Japan.

It was almost a year later when Mrs. Higuchi wrote that three short-tailed kittens were finally available and suggested that I write to Judy Crawford, the kittens' owner, in Yokohama to arrange for their shipment. Judy replied immediately to my letter and I learned that she was originally from Pennsylvania but had lived in Japan since World War II. Over the years, she had befriended many stray Japanese street cats, including several with short tails. These, or their short-tailed progeny, she regularly entered in the local cat shows as Household Pets, hoping ultimately to interest some of the Japanese fanciers in developing this striking breed. She was, of course, delighted to learn from Mrs. Higuchi that someone in America was interested in these cats and, determined to send over only the best possible specimens, she had bred some thirty-six kittens that spring for the express purpose of selecting two or three of the best to send to me.

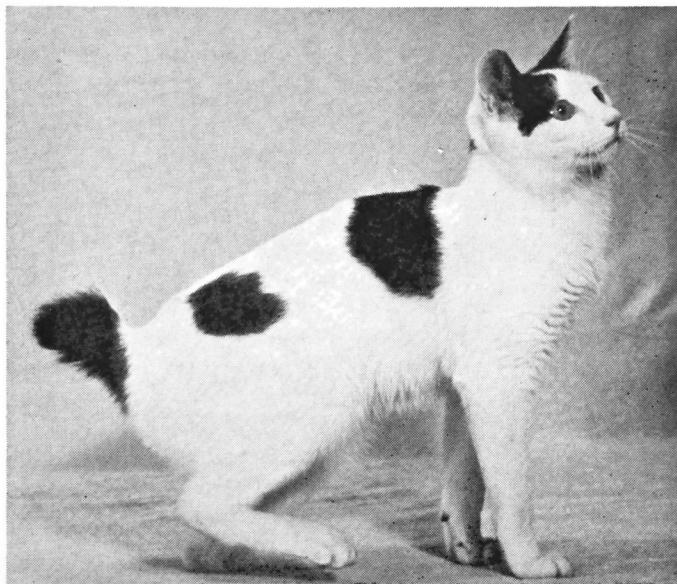
It was a memorable day in August, 1968 when I met Judy Crawford's kittens at Dulles Airport — a beautiful calico who immediately



Print by Kuniyoshi — 1797-1861
 Bobtail cat hiding in
 the mistress' robes



Print by Chikanobu — 1880
 Bobtail cat sleeping in
 mistress' boudoir



Amulet's Karate, present day
 Bobtail owned by Mrs. Freret

Photo by the Allens

became Mme. Butterfly, a deep red and white male who kept his original name of Richard, and a cinnamon colored tabby female who lives with Bernice Cool. The kittens were delightful. They had no problem in adjusting to my other cats and remained extremely healthy, impervious even to the colds which some of my Aby's brought back from a cat show later in the fall. Butterfly particularly impressed me as being uniquely amiable, affectionate and intelligent; moreover, like my Abyssinians, she proved to be a born retriever. However, I have since observed that these traits are characteristic of the breed.

Mme. Butterfly is nonetheless virtually unique in one respect — she is, in fact, a four-colored calico with two distinctly blue patches of color in addition to her vivid red and jet black spots. Indeed, these blue patches of hers almost ended the Japanese Bobtail as a breed before it even began. Having read an article in CATS Magazine on color genetics in cats, I wrote to the two scientists in Washington state whose research was mentioned, asking about the significance of Butterfly's fourth color. They replied immediately and with great interest. Based on their studies, they said the blue spots could only be explained as the result of a simultaneous fertilization by sperm from two different males. They wanted very much to have Butterfly, but if I would not part with her, they hoped I would consider breeding her to a long haired blue male and sending them the kittens. Depending on the colors of the first litter, they also mapped out several subsequent breedings with various colors of males. So contagious was their interest that I decided to defer mating Butterfly with Richard in favor of advancing the science of genetics. Geraldine Merchant agreed to make her Gr. Ch. blue Persian male available and twice Butterfly, very much in season, lived with him for a week. But nothing happened either time; Butterfly didn't even get a little bit pregnant.

When Butterfly again came in season, Mrs. Merchant's blue male was not available—he had a prior engagement with a Persian queen. Since Butterfly was already more than a year old, I decided to try her with Richard. This time, success! She became very pregnant. I must confess, however, that even as D-Day approached, I expected her kittens to have a variety of tail lengths. Despite the marked difference in body and head type, as well as coat texture, between these Japanese cats and the Manx, I anticipated that the tail (or non-tail) gene was probably the same in both. Instead, Butterfly's five kittens all had tails just like hers and Richard's; they were vividly colored, precocious little babies who climbed over the six-inch sides of a shoe-box bassinette while their brothers and sisters were still being born! I cabled Judy Crawford immediately, and I'll never know which of us was the more excited.

Two months later in September 1969, I took Butterfly and her kittens to the CFA Board meeting in Trenton, New Jersey, along with a brief memorandum on their background, a proposed standard, and Fernand Mery's book, **The Life, History and Magic of the CAT**, which contained a Japanese drawing (at page 94) of some nine or ten short-

tailed cats, to verify the fact that they had long existed in Japan. The Board agreed at that meeting to accept the Japanese Bobtail for registration as a new breed, and again I cabled the good news to Judy Crawford immediately.

Richard Gebhardt and Jane Martinke have been exceptionally helpful in the development of this new breed and the formulation of the standard. Both had seen Butterfly earlier in 1969 when she was on exhibit at the Washington, D. C. cat show at Laurel Race Track and had noted her distinctive type and coat texture. And after the Trenton Board meeting, Jane Martinke accompanied me to the Allens' home in West Orange and watched Ted and Creszentia Allen take the superb photographs of Butterfly and her kittens which have since appeared in both CATS and Cat Fancy Magazine. Indeed, along with the Allens' photographs and the impression these lovely cats themselves create on nearly all who see them, the greatest impetus to their growing popularity as a new breed has been Jane Martinke's illustrated article on the Japanese Bobtail in the May 1970 issue of CATS.

Of course, without the initial efforts of Judy Crawford in particular, and Bess Higuchi as well, there would not yet be a Japanese Bobtail breed. And the Bobtails could not have advanced to Provisional Breed status as of May 1, 1971, without the excellent specimens they've subsequently furnished, plus several beautiful females I've received from Dr. Masanori Kojima, a Tokyo veterinarian to whom I've sold several Abyssinians (including a pregnant female who produced a litter of seven kittens, perhaps the largest Aby litter on record). Mrs. Alan (Connie) Bath, whose husband is assistant Naval Attache at the Tokyo Embassy and whose Conalan Persians are internationally famous, has also sent over some outstanding cats and kittens which she bred this past year, and has provided copies of prints and paintings depicting short-tailed cats from her collection of Japanese art. Among the pioneer Bobtail breeders are three CFA judges who have also been instrumental in popularizing the breed — Virginia Wolfe, Lynn Beck, and Don Thompson.



(From a scroll in Mrs. Bath's collection)