

I say Tomayto, You say Tomahto – Variances in the Brown Tabby

By Tanya Wehren-Akin

Very soon after you have fallen in love with your very first Bengal, especially if it is a brown spotted or marbled tabby, you realize that each one of them tends to differ to some degree from the other, be it in terms of color or pattern or even type. This article is a descriptive attempt at illustrating some of the variations used to define the color nuances of the brown tabby that differ from what we would call the “regular” brown tabby.

The Bengal standard allows for all various shades of brown for the background color and various shades of brown to black for the Bengal pattern. In practice, this leaves the Bengal breeder/fancier with a huge spectrum of brown shades ranging from a pale beige-like tawny to dark brown and everything in-between... In order to better describe our brown spotted/marbled tabby, breeders have adopted certain designators that are more or less commonly used to describe the variations within this color. Although there are a number of different shades of the brown tabby, they are ultimately the **same** genetic color – black*.

The most commonly seen shades are the sorrel, the charcoal, and the golden. The highly rufoused sorrel with its warm pattern at one end of the spectrum and the charcoal at the other. The golden is a whole different story altogether...

The Sorrel Brown Tabby

A sorrel in Bengal-speak “looks” like a cinnamon but it “is” not a real cinnamon genetically speaking. In the case of a sorrel, with its black tail tip we still are talking about a brown tabby. A sorrel, like all the other variations described in this article, is a brown (black) tabby which just has a different appearance. Of all the variations, the term “sorrel” has been the most misleading as it is in all other breeds genetically a color with its own genetic code whereas a Bengal sorrel is genetically no different from all other brown tabbies.

The basic definition of a sorrel is “a cat whose pattern marking is other than black”. These cats usually display a very high degree of rufousing, causing the cat to have a warm reddish color, hence sorrel. Sorrel brown tabbies in turn also display variances in coloring themselves, ranging from very pale almost blond sorrels to very hot-colored bengals. Whited undersides or expressions also seem to be more common among these types of cats than any other variation.



A young sorrel BST – Boomkatz Iris

A very pregnant sorrel bred by Outlaws

The Charcoal Brown Tabby

When we speak of a charcoal-colored brown tabby we are usually describing a cat with little or no rufousing on an almost grey-colored background with dark black spots. These are probably the least common types of all variances as rufousing is a common occurrence in almost all brown tabby Bengals, which is thought to be a polygenetic trait. Interestingly, total lack of rufousing in charcoals has caused some breeders to think there may be some secondary aspect playing a role in rufousing after all.

Nevertheless, one of the most striking aspect of the charcoal is the jet-black markings these cats seem to display making them dramatically wild-looking. In a breeding framework, these charcoal brown tabbies may prove to be instrumental in adding the type of the Bengal into silver programs without the unwanted roufinism "regular" Bengals automatically introduce into silver lines.



A charcoal BST bred at Stonehenge



A charcoal adult – Stonehenge Dark Vadar

The Golden Brown Tabby

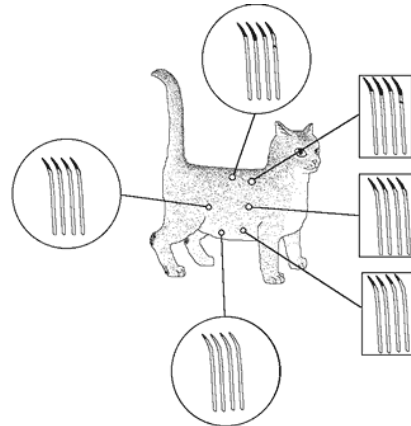
Apart from the golden appearance of golden brown tabby, the nomenclature is obviously derived from the assumption that goldens are a direct result of the silver influence, hence “silver and golden”. There are numerous theories attempting to explain the origin of the unticked, i.e. clear coated look of the golden Bengal: Some attribute this to the “color” silver, others to the American Shorthair used to establish silver in Bengals, and others maintain that the clarity achieved in these cats is a result of year-long selection.



A young golden BST – Dazzledots Fancy Stepper

Great contrast – Korshki Golden Nugget

The silver tabby American Shorthair used in silver Bengal programs is genetically very similar to the silver shaded American Shorthair (in fact, according to the CFA standard it IS a shaded cat), which is a cat that displays the wide banding (see drawing). This wide banding is responsible for the clarity, through the widening of the band that normally gives the cat a “ticked” appearance. The result of this widening gives the golden brown tabby its vibrant clear “golden” coat.



Another phenomenon seen in the golden BST is the lack of red roufinism that normally gradually spreads throughout most of a cat’s coat with age. These warm golden brown tabbies appear to stay golden, seeming to remain unaffected by roufinism. The reason for the lack of roufinism can be found either through selection by silver Bengal breeders using unrufoused brown tabbies when breeding to silvers to avoid tarnishing in their silvers plus the already existing absence of roufinism in the silver ASHs through selection. The wide banding could also be seen as a contributor to less roufinism. As to whether or not there is a specific gene responsible for the wide banding, the general consensus is that the wide banding is a result of selection. The ongoing discussion as to whether the silvers are responsible for the golden brown tabby or whether it is a result of the years of work done by brown tabby breeders to produce clearer coats – technically, both are right since both premises are based on selection.

And last but not least, we cannot forget the “regular” brown tabbies that do not display any of the above-variance. Here some photos:



Sun Savana Victor of BoomKatz



Millwood Bakari of Katznjamr

* I would also like to point out that the Bengal's color has not only been subject to discussion in terms of its variation within this one color, the color itself has been the source of some confusion. TICA refers to the BST or BMT as a "brown" spotted tabby, whereas international associations refer to the "B" as "black", which is a more appropriate identifier as the cat is genetically the color black.