

The State of the Bengal Cat in the Netherlands

By Tanya Wehren-Akin

Writing about the status of the development of my cats or a single group of breeders would surely not do the Bengal in the Netherlands any justice, so how does one person write about the status of an entire breed at a national level? You organize information gathered during talks, correspondence, and discussions with fellow breeders, find pictures representing the vast types, patterns and colors currently being bred AND if you're REALLY lucky, attend a seminar/workshop entirely dedicated to treating the development of the Bengal cat... not a bad place to start. So that is what I did. I attended a Bengal forum, primarily intended as a course for prospective judges, it consisted of a lecture part and a Q&A part for judges and breeders alike.

Dutch breeders are extremely selective

Dutch demographics, the inability for everyone to keep studs due to the country's dense population, the comparatively low number of litters produced per cattery per year and the method of solely breeding underfoot are all aspects that give rise to the need for intelligent breeding, good breeding practices and very selective breeding.



Dolce e Macchiato's Morag owned by Chickamaugu Bengals

This has also given way to the motto among many breeders here: Improve the Bengal breed, don't just multiply it:



Judge Els Smits (Indracats) demonstrating type and "down to the skin" markings on a wild-looking girl bred at Lopend Vuur

breeding practices with the intent to merely produce kittens without any specific breeding goal or improvement in mind is generally looked down upon. And there are a growing number of breeders who are joining forces to help each other and to educate the public to achieve the ultimate goal – the perfect Bengal.

The Netherlands can currently boast approx. 30 Bengal catteries that are actively engaged in showing and promoting their Bengals.



A warm yellow girl with nice brown rosettes bred at Indracats

These breeders also invest a considerable amount of time and money to achieve their

specific goals. And looking at what is currently going on in the Netherlands, I have to say we are on our best way there. If there's one thing the Dutch excel at, it's networking; the Dutch Bengal scene is closely intertwined with numerous other breeders throughout Europe and the United States, the result of which is reflected in some of the most beautiful and cutting-edge Bengals being produced today.



Clear coat and contrast on Timbavati Socrates of Boomkatz

Now and the Future

“We all have the same goal, we just take different paths to get there.”

I have to start with a quote from a closing statement by Dutch Bengal breeder and judge Els Smits at the end of a seminar on the standard and the development of the Bengal in the Netherlands, “We (the breeders) all have the same goal, we just take different paths to get there”. Of course, we want it all in a Bengal, but breeders place higher priorities on different aspects within their own specific programs.

In terms of type, we are all striving to breed long, strong bodies, with muscular necks flowing into a beautiful ALC-like profile. This type is currently surpassing the older, more chubby type silhouetted Bengal. We are also seeing more and more Bengals with strong legs (preferably spotted) and nice big, round paws. Nowadays, one hardly ever sees unobtrusive patterns with vertically-

aligned small spots. Most Dutch breeders are currently working successfully with either horizontally-aligned or randomly-aligned patterns, with large expressive spots and/or striking two-colored rosettes. We want the color, the pattern and coat texture to be as striking as that of the wild cat.



A beautiful rosetted litter bred by Hannah Houben of Dolce e Macchiato

Some breeders will ease up a bit on color and pattern and really try to hit home on type, selecting primarily for small ears, good head types, eye size and placement, contrast, and the overall “wild look”. These typey, less colourful cats may aid in combating age-related ruffousing in Bengals that causes a cat to turn redder and redder in later years.



A beautiful Indracats stud with great staying contrast

Another goal that Dutch breeders are pursuing quite keenly is the breeding out of unwanted recessives, such as blue, long hair, melanistic, and the like. The notion that the Bengal should resemble the leopard cat is taken very seriously and in that respect, Dutch breeders have come a long way in establishing lines that are relatively free of unwanted recessives by

selectively excluding lines that carry for those traits.

Other things we have achieved and would like to reinforce in our Bengals is a good, staying contrast, clear coats (less or no ticking), nice warm yellow colors, down to the skin markings, nice thick tails, to name just a few. We would also like to see more ALC facial features in our Bengals – the disappearance of the tabby “M”, white chins and cheeks, white spectacles, rounded foreheads and the ALC profile we all like so much. Achieving these goals are among the most significant and exciting set of challenges we breeders are confronted with.

Dutch breeding programs have achieved quite a lot thanks to the dedication and ongoing critical discussion among breeders who see their breeding program as more than “just” a breeding program - it’s an art form.

So how do you close a piece on the status of the Bengal cat in the Netherlands? By thanking all the Dutch breeders who have supplied me with priceless information, motivation, and of course for their beautiful Bengals.



Sun Savana Victor of Boomkatz